THE WILD WOMAN AND HER SISTERS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

ABSTRACT iv

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1 GRENDEL'S MOTHER 9

2 HARPIES, SIRENS, AND MERMAIDS 33

3 BÉROUL'S ISEUT 52

4 CHAUCER'S EMELYE 68

5 THE WIFE OF BATH 87

6 CONCLUSION 113

ANNOTATED LIST OF WORKS CITED 120

NON-ANNOTATED LIST OF WORKS CITED 126

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 135

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The Introduction discusses subcategories of Wild Woman: the Terrible Mother, as exemplified in Grendel's mother of the Old English poem *Beowulf*; the Seductress, represented here by the mermaid; the Untamable Wild Woman, represented by Béroul's Iseut and Chaucer's Wife of Bath; and the Tamed Wild Woman, Chaucer's Emelye and the Wife of Bath. Each individual chapter considers one of these figures.

In Chapter 1, Grendel's mother is a figure from the depths of the psyche, "both subhuman and superhuman, a creature of dark and cold waters." Beowulf's psychological makeup in confrontation with this being is also examined.

Chapter 2 traces the harpy through the siren and the mermaid of folklore. The Middle English *Physiologus* is used as a medieval example of a being who lures men and kills them.

Iseut in Chapter 3 defies the conventions of court life; an adulteress, she and her lover flee to the forest. Chaucer's Emelye in Chapter 4 also loves the forest, but is faced with the necessity of marriage and submission.

The Wife of Bath (Chapter 5) struggles against convention through four marriages. She and her fifth husband, the clerk Jankyn, learn that marriage must be a compromise to be successful. The Wife is tamed—but still gets her way.

Chapter 6 is a summary bringing together all these figures, comparing and contrasting them in the hope that this journey will prove meaningful for the reader in understanding literature and woman.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this work is the concept and figure of the Wild Woman. The primary focus will be on various forms this figure assumes in medieval English literature: Grendel's mother—the second monster Beowulf faces—and Chaucer's Wife of Bath, along with other figures.

The intended audience for this work is varied. First and foremost, it is intended for medievalists and students of medieval literature, but it should also be of interest to teachers and students of women's studies, and to general readers who are interested in the topic of the Wild Woman as well.

I am not defining the Wild Woman as a not-man or a not-Wild Man. In at least part of the long extended period from which my examples are drawn, women were considered wild just because they were women. As Jeanne Addison Roberts points out: "Forces outside [the] ethnic human male Cultural core were and have been continued to be thought of as parts of the Wild"[1] simply because they were "outside" (2). And Thomas G. Bergin comments, "Only in a society prepared to appreciate and enjoy the things that the world of the living has to offer can normal women be observed and portrayed without the

[1]Roberts is writing about Shakespeare's Wild Woman, but what she says is often applicable to the medieval period as well.

distortions or sublimations of one kind or another" (169). We exclude here most of the female characters portrayed by the otherworld-looking, celibate male clergy (or even those who did not fall into this category, such as Gower or Chaucer). Such characters tend to be either passive, compliant dolls (like Chaucer's patient Griselda) or hypersexual, rampant women. Not all the figures we shall be discussing fall into these two categories: Grendel's mother, for example, or Iseut.

We need to begin by asking two questions: Who and what is the Wild Woman? What does the term mean? I divide the concept into several parts, chronologically presented as follows:

The most frightening Wild Woman of all, Grendel's mother of the Old English heroic poem *Beowulf* (Chapter 1), is well described by Erich Neumann's Jungian concept of the *Terrible Mother* (149-70). The Terrible Mother is a figure evolved from the small child's split good/bad mother image. (See Melanie Klein.) Possessing both masculine and feminine aspects, Grendel's mother fiercely takes up her sword to avenge the mutilation and death of her son. She is both subhuman and superhuman, a creature of dark and cold waters, evoking for the modern reader a reluctant admiration accompanied by revulsion and fear.

The *Wild Woman as Seductress* is represented here by the mermaid (Chapter 2). She is in part a subset of the Innocent type (see below), but in reality she only looks, and pretends to be, innocent; in medieval times she was also thought of as a dangerous seductress. I call her the "Half Human Wild

Woman" or the "Seductive Wild Woman," and find it worthwhile to call attention to the evolution of the mermaid over the centuries, from the loathsome and hideous harpy through the dangerous siren to the lovely and innocuous creature of modern folklore (beginning probably with the literary tale by Hans Christian Andersen, "The Little Mermaid," and recently evoked by the film *Splash*).

Type three, the *Untamable Wild Woman*, falls into two separate, or separable, subtypes. One is illustrated by Béroul's Iseut, who pretends to follow the conventions of life expected of a queen and court lady but who is, and is determined to continue to be, wild and unrepentant. Not only does she live in the forest for a short while, but she is adulterous and scheming, telling clever lies that are only half lies to keep her reputation pure. She is, of course, also seductive. She is presented here in Chapter 3. The other type, exemplified here by the Wife of Bath, who has dominated four older husbands and won the right to do as she pleases with the fifth, serves as the subject of Chapter 5.

The *Gentle and Sweet Wild Woman*, whom I call the "Innocent Wild Woman," I do not discuss at any length here. The Innocent Wild Woman in figure 1, a character of folklore, seems to do little but enjoy the company of her wild family and suckle her children. Ability to live in the forest is one of her attributes, which she shares with Iseut. However, unlike Iseut, she is not "wild" in the sense in which I use the word for the other types. The Emelye of Chapter 4, a character in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," also has some attributes of the Innocent Wild Woman in her love of the forest and its pleasures.

Fig. 1. The Innocent Wild Woman (Husband 26).

The *Tamed Wild Woman* is a title I apply to the woman who was originally wild but became tame (without, I hope, losing quite all of her wildness). Emelye is an example of this type; another is Zenobia or "Cenobie" of the same author's

"Monk's Tale," a warrior and hunter who goes into battle both with and without her husband. Zenobia "fledde/Office of women" and "many a wilde hertes blood . . . shedde" but also marries and bears children (Chaucer 245-6). Perhaps Zenobia should be considered a partially tamed Wild Woman—although, of course, all Wild Women cannot be tamed.

The second type of *Untamable Wild Woman* is one who lives in society but can be found anywhere and who breaks social conventions for women by her assertive and even aggressive (including sexually aggressive) behavior. Examples of this kind of Wild Woman are such fictional characters as Godelief, briefly introduced as Harry Bailly the innkeeper's wife in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Chaucer's Wife of Bath, a female figure to be discussed at length in Chapter 5. I call this subtype the *Worldly Wild Woman*. The Wife may be adulterous; on the other hand, she may merely be a "battle-ax," to use the colloquial phrase for this type.

Another figure enters into the development of the Wife of Bath character: the *Loathly Lady* of folklore (Thompson 259, motif D732). She appears not only in the "Wife's Tale" but also in such works as John Gower's "Tale of Florent" in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and Child's "The Wedding of Sir Gawain." Changing from repulsive hag to lovely woman as soon as she is promised "her will," she is a shapechanger and the bearer of an important truth: Women are human and deserve a voice in marriage. In her hag shape she overlaps with the Jungian Terrible Mother.

Since my main approach in this study is a psychoanalytic one, it may be helpful to prepare the way by considering the thoughts of two great psychoanalytic masters—Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung—and their followers on these types of woman.

Importantly, a follower of Freud, Wolfgang Lederer, published *The Fear of Women* in 1968. As the title promises, his subject is the fear of women that men may have and the reasons for this fear. Woman is "as much dreaded as adored," "a deep, dangerous and alluring space . . . the vessel that cannot be adequately filled by man." Grendel's mother is the Jungian Terrible Mother, goddess of death and the underworld; she is a denizen of water, that feminine element "connected with danger and with death" (Lederer 25, 235, 126-7). The Jungian approach, however, because of Jung's emphasis on myth, has proved more helpful to me than Freud's.

Erich Neumann, a Jungian analyst, connects the Terrible Mother with earth rather than with water: "[T]his woman who generates life and all living things on earth is the same who takes them back into herself, who pursues her victims and captures them with snare and net" (149). One does not have to be a Jungian to see that this concept is always present in the figure of the mother. Earth is thought of as a mother, and dead bodies go into the earth or may even be eaten.

In Jungian thinking, various types of woman correspond to archetypes. In his "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," Jung defines archetypes, a

concept of major importance in his theory, as "primordial types . . . universal images that have existed since the remotest times" (6). In his description of the anima, "not the soul in the dogmatic sense . . . but a natural archetype that satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion," Jung seems to subsume both the Innocent Wild Woman and the mermaid type.[2] The anima is "the serpent in the paradise of the harmless man with good resolutions and still better intentions," but she can also appear as "an angel of light, a psychopomp [guide or conductor of souls] who points the way to the highest meaning" (28, 29).

In the same way as the Innocent Wild Woman and the mermaid are subsumed in the anima, the Wife of Bath and the Terrible Mother are subsumed in aspects of the mother figure. A patient of Jung's had a fantasy of a "divine woman . . . *wearing a blood-red garment that covers the lower half of her body*" who "*hands* [a young girl] *as a present to the many men who are standing by*" ("Archetypes," 192). The red garment reminds us of the Wife of Bath with her red stockings, and the role of the woman in "initiating" girls seems a not impossible one for her. The mother figure is further developed as the loving and terrible mother. The loving mother is characterized by solicitude, sympathy, and helpfulness recognized by medieval writers (who were, as stated above,

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[2]It goes without saying that Jung's use of "primitive" here would not be acceptable to modern readers; a suitable near-synonym might be "preliterate."

primarily male), while the Terrible Mother frightens men, bringing about a strong impact on their attitudes toward women, women's bodies, and women's personalities.

I shall be presenting, then, the stories of five Wild Women, each of whom must be considered as an individual representation of the group. Chapter 1 goes to the beginning of English literature with Grendel's mother and her conflict with Beowulf, portrayed in terms made available by Carl Jung, Melanie Klein, and Dorothy Bloch. Chapter 2 treats the harpy, siren, and seductive mermaid. Chapter 3 presents Iseut as Béroul dramatizes her; she is seen as Wild Woman and as Celt (Leslie Rabino). Chapter 4 discusses Chaucer's Emelye in the light of Jungian theory, while Chapter 5 takes up in detail Chaucer's Wife of Bath, including the figure of the Loathly Lady, and the Wife's struggle with the conventions of her society.

CHAPTER 1
GRENDEL'S MOTHER

In this first chapter of our study, we shall look at the nature of the oldest Wild Woman in English literature: Grendel's mother of the Old English epic *Beowulf*. Is she a monster, a fearsome mere-wife, as she initially appears? Is she a brave figure, boldly avenging her son Grendel, who has been killed by Beowulf? It is certainly true that in recent years she has received a better press than formerly. Edward B. Irving, Jr., for example (70), says, "She has the perfectly acceptable obligation to avenge [Grendel's] death" and calls her "many readers' favorite monster" (73). And David Williams says: "Vengeance, a primary value in Germanic society, is immediately [after Beowulf's wounding of Grendel--AHL] undertaken by Grendel's mother with the injury to her son, demonstrating that in her kin, too, it is a value. . . . [This is] one of the skillful ways in which the fabulous world of Grendel interlocks with the historical world of the Danes and provides an implicit didactic comment on it" (54). Grendel's mother is seen not just as a monster but also as a mother, doing what a mother might do after the violent death of a son.

What, then, is our direction in this, one of the many reexaminations of this character? While we can certainly see Grendel's mother as a Wild Woman, we need to ask two questions in our attempt to understand her: (1) What, exactly, is Grendel's mother--monster, human being, or goddess? (2) More importantly,

what is she doing in the poem? If we need a monster, isn't Grendel enough? Why a female monster? Why a mother?

Let us return to Irving's phrase "many readers' favorite monster." The *American Heritage Dictionary* gives among its definitions of "monster" . . . [a] creature having a bizarre or frightening shape or appearance . . . [a] very large animal, plant, or object . . . [o]ne who inspires horror or disgust" (812). Is this true of Grendel's mother? She and her son are *like* humans, but larger. They are not giants, however, Andy Orchard (58) assures us, as the term *gigant* is used only for those who were drowned in the Flood. Grendel is "larger than any other man" (line 1353), so presumably his mother is larger than any other woman, but they are still referred to, in the passage describing them (lines 1345-53), as humans of a sort. Are they really so fearsome-looking? Are they partly human and partly animal (as monsters tend to be)? Are they folk characters? Supernatural beings?

Let us look at some of the views that have been advanced. Christine Alfano argues that Grendel's mother is not a monster but human: "Instead of being what Sherman Kuhn calls 'a female warrior,' the modern Grendel's mother [of contemporary translations] is a monster. . . . Grendel's mother disrupts gender conventions; to the Anglo-Saxons, this made her *atol*, 'terrible' (line 1332), but to contemporary translators, it makes her 'monstrous'" (2). Alfano concludes that translators have divested Grendel's mother of humanity.

Fig. 1-1. The Monster of Noves. From Jones (frontispiece).

On the monster side, Gwyn Jones uses as the frontispiece of his book *Kings Beasts and Heroes* the figure of the Monster of Noves (Bouches-du-Rhône, France), a not unengaging creature with a likable grin and a human arm protruding from its mouth (fig. 1-1). Jones says: "The Monster of Noves is not Grendel or Grendel's Mother . . . but he is monsterly enough even so, with a

human arm protruding from his devouring mouth and two long-visaged Celtic heads poised with hideous precision betwixt his fore and hinder paws." He describes Grendel as "in human form but devoid of humanity . . . [l]ike the Norse *draugr* or animated corpse," and speculates that Beowulf himself might originally have been half-human and half bear. In some of the Bear's Son stories the hero is the son of a bear who has stolen his mother (xxiv, 8-9, 12). Can this bear-father have developed into Grendel? A bear seen from a distance, standing up, could resemble a shaggy half-human—and probably the most dangerous wild animal is a mother bear defending her cub!

Signe Carlson (362) speculates that Grendel, and hence his mother, may be just large "men," i.e., humans (this is indeed how they are described in the poem), possibly cannibals (she notes that Grendel and his mother antedate Christianity and that e*oten* 'giant' probably has the same root as e*ten* 'to eat' and may have been applied to real cannibals). Perhaps, she suggests, such people may have been real aboriginal inhabitants of England. Hrothgar states (lines 1345-53):[1]

Ic þæt londbūend, lēode mīne, selerædende secgan hȳrde, þæt hīe gesâwon swylce twēgen micle mearcstapan mōras healdan,	I heard hall-counselors tell the story of the land-dwellers, O my people, that they saw such two [beings], great march[2]-wanderers living on the moors,

[1]All quotations from *Beowulf* are from Klaeber's edition as translated by the present author.

[2]border.

ellorgæstas. Ðæra ōðer wæs,
þæs þe hīe gewislīcost gewitan meahton,
idese onlīcnes; ōðer earmsceapen
on weres wæstmum wræclāstas træd,
næfne hē wæs māra þonne ænig ōðer. . . .

alien spirits. One of them was
most likely, as far as [the counselors] knew,
in a woman's likeness; the other, poor wretch,
trod the paths of exile in a man's form,
except that he was larger than any other man. . . .

Eoten, however, is defined in Clark Hall's *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* as "giant, monster, enemy" (107). "Monster" has been discussed above. "Enemy" is important and sums up the way in which we first perceive Grendel. Both J.R. Clark Hall and Fr. Klaeber (325) refer the reader to *etan*, *eten* "eat, glutton," thus agreeing with Carlson. Indeed, much of what Grendel and his mother do is to eat, though we would hardly approve of their diet.

H. Munro Chadwick and N. Kershaw Chadwick say, "Grendel and his mother seem to be partly anthropomorphic . . . although they do not speak. . . ." (209, 209n), and, in support of this, cite Grendel's use of a bag and his mother's use of a knife. The "boar-imaged helmet" makes her seem half-animal, while some have argued that she may be superhuman, a goddess in fact. The human warriors of *Beowulf* wear boar helmets.

What in fact does Grendel's mother do, and what does that reveal about her? First of all, we must go to the poem itself. In lines 1258-61 and 1277-95 we see that she,

ides āglæcwīf yrmþe gemunde,
sē þe wæteregesan wunian scolde, . . .
gīfre ond galgmōd gegān wolde

warrior-woman, mind full of misery,
who by dreadful water was wont to live, . . .
greedy and gloomy, wanted to go

sorhfulne sīð, sunu *deoð* wrecan.	a sorrowful path, to avenge her son's death.
Cōm þa tō Heorote, ðær Hring-Dene	[She] came then to Heorot, where the Ring-Danes
geond þæt sæld swæfun. Þā ðær sōna wearð	along the hall slept. At once there was
edhwyrft eorlum, siþðan inne fealh	reverse for the warriors, as in [there] came
Grendles mōdor. Wæs se gryre læssa	Grendel's mother. The horror was less
efne swā micle, swā bið mægþa cræft,	just by so much as her strength was,
wīggryre wīfes be wæpnedmen,	the wife's war-terror than the weapon-men's,
þonne heoru bunden, hamere geþrūen,	when an adorned sword, hammer-forged,
sweord swāte fāh swin ofer helme	shining with blood, the boar-imaged helmet
ecgum dyhtig andweard scireð.	cut through, opposing, with a strong edge.
Đā wæs on healle heardecg togen	Then was in the hall hard-edged sword drawn
sweord ofer setlum, sīdrand manig	over the seats, many broad shields
hafen handa fæst; helm ne gemunde,	raised firm by hands; when horror seized him,
byrnan sīde, þā hine se brōga angeat.	no one thought of helmet or of broad mail.
Hēo wæs on ofste, wolde ūt þanon,	She was in haste, wanted to escape,
fēore beorgan, þā hēo onfunden wæs;	preserved by fear, when she was discovered;
hraðe hēo æþelinga ānne hæfde	quickly she caught fast one of the nobles,
fæste befangen, þā hēo tō fenne gang.	when she went [back] to the marsh.

What kind of picture of Grendel's mother does this give us? The poem, while it describes actions, does not provide an answer. Is she a human or humanlike warrior-woman bent on revenge and then escape? Is she a nonhuman monster? Or can we see her as a goddess figure? Significantly, Hilda Ellis Davidson suggests that Grendel's mother may be a hunting-goddess, a "Mistress of the Wild to whom hunters turned for assistance," that her presence

in the poem may indicate memories of hunting-goddesses in Anglo-Saxon England (21). Although Grendel's mother lives under a lake, she ranges over boundaries with her son, a *mearcstapa*, moor-stepper or "strider over the marches" as Davidson translates the compound word. She is described as "associated with both the wilderness and the depths of the water":

> She is called *brimwylf*, wolf of the lake (1566), *grundwyrgen*, accursed monster of the deep (1518), and *merewif mihtig*, mighty woman of the mere (1519). . . . Moreover, she is specifically called the ruler or guardian of the depths, *grundhyrde* (2136), which would be appropriate for a being remembered as a Mistress of the Wild. Such a power might rule the creatures of water as well as the forest and the mountain. . . . The mother of Grendel was clearly a powerful and dangerous adversary, and she appears in the poem to be a kind of hag, a monster-woman (*aglœc-wif*, 1259), of dark intent (*galgmod*, 1276). (22)

Beowulf's killing of a water-creature on the way to Grendel's mother's lake could be the basis for the mother's ferocious attack on Beowulf, Davidson suggests, if water-creatures are under her protection. Stags, too, may be under her protection; the building of Heorot adorned by antlers could have angered both Grendel and his mother even before the wounding of Grendel. Also, as Davidson argues, Grendel's father is not known; this is traditional for sons of hunting-goddesses (23).

Pursuing this idea further, we may wonder why the term *ides* 'lady' is applied to the mother. Again, Davidson has a suggestion: "In view of the well-established ability of the hunting-goddess to alternate between the form of a beautiful, seductive woman and that of a fearful hag, this deliberate use of *ides*

would strengthen the case for taking Grendel's mother for a being of this kind" (22). Is Grendel's mother, then, a Loathly Lady who alternates between hag and beautiful woman, a seductress perhaps in either role? Is she a tamer of both animals and men? Do we have another Circe here?

Others give support to the Grendel's-mother-as-goddess concept. Anne Ross, in her *Pagan Celtic Britain*, points out that Celtic goddesses are often connected with healing waters (275, 279, 455); hag goddesses (*cailleachs*) are connected with sacred wells (281, 293, 421). This unites the hag figure with the goddess. The Morrigan, a Celtic war goddess, or rather one of a trio of war goddesses, can appear as a "terror-inspiring hag," a beautiful young woman, or a crow or raven; this seems to unite the hag with the Valkyrie (48, 313). Thomas D. Hill too quotes Orosius as saying that the Gothic "witch" race with its "unclean spirit" companions "dwelt at first in the swamps" (Hill 2001; see below).

Mostly, however, Grendel's mother is seen as a monster, a hag, usually fearful but sometimes speechless and stupid, as John Gardner describes her in his novel *Grendel* and as the illustration by Flóki seems to present her (fig. 1-2). The monster interpretation has been supported by many translators, as Alfano points out (see above). John D. Niles also describes Grendel and his mother as being "like people, with a kind of rudimentary culture," who at the same time "have the size and appetites of giants or trolls. On one hand they recall the night-striders of Germanic folk-belief. . . . On the other, they are the devils of

Christian belief. . . ." (138) Like the Chadwicks, Niles notes the resemblance of the Beowulf story to folktale, specifically AT301 "The Bear's Son" (401-2).

Fig. 1-2. Grendel's Mother. Drawing by Flóki reprinted, with permission, from Halldóra B. Björnsson's *Bjólfskviða* (Reykjavík: Fjölvi, 1983), 61. From Osborn.

Let us look now at Grendel's mother in action, in the scene of the battle with Beowulf (fig. 1-3) (lines 1497-1507, 1518-28, 1537-69):

Fig. 1-3. The fight with Grendel's mother. From Bone, unpaged.

Sōna þæt onfunde sē ðe flōda begong
heorogīfre behēold hund missēra,
grim ond grǣdig, þæt þær gumena sum
ælwihta eard ufan cunnode.

Grāp þā tōgēanes, guðrinc gefēng
atolan clommum; nō þȳ ǣr in gescōd
hālan līce; hring ūtan ymbbearh,
þæt hēo þone fyrdhom ðurhfōn ne mihte,
locene leoðosyrcan lāþan fingrum.

Bær þā sēo brimwyl[f], þā hēo tō botme cōm,
hringa þengel tō hofe sīnum. . . .

Ongeat þā se gōda grundwyrgenne,
merewīf mihtig; mægenrǣs forgeaf
hildebille, hond sweng ne oftēah,
þæt hire on hafelan hringmǣl āgōl
grædig gūðlēoð. Ðā se gist onfand,
þæt se beadolēoma bītan nolde,
aldre sceþðan, ac sēo ecg geswāc
ðēodne æt þearfe; ðolode ǣr fela
hondgemōta, helm oft gescær,
fǣges fyrdhrægl; ðā wæs forma sið
dēorum mādme, þæt his dōm ālæg.

(Klaeber 56-7)

Gefēng þā be eaxle —nalas for fæhðe mearn—

At once he found the place of the floods,
where she lived, fiercely hungry, a hundred half-years,
grim and greedy; there a man could explore from above the aliens' dwellings.
She grasped at him, in her terrible grip
caught the warrior; not yet was his body injured, [but] protected by
ring mail outside, so that she could not break through the war-dress, the linked coat of mail
with her hostile fingers. The female sea-wolf
bore when she came to the bottom the ring-clad prince to her dwelling. . . .
The good man saw the cursed bottom-dweller,
the mighty mere-wife; he gave a great blow
with his battle-sword, nor held back his stroke,
so that on her head the ring-patterned sword
sang a greedy war-song. Then the guest found
that his gleaming sword would not bite her,
[would not] harm her life, but the blade failed
the prince in his need; before, he'd endured
many hand-battles, his helmet cleaved
and his war-coat of death; this was the first time
that the precious treasure failed his glory. . . .

The Geatish man grabbed by the hair—

Gūð-Gēata lēod Grendles mōdor;
brægd þā beadwe heard, þā hē gebolgen wæs,
feorhgeniðlan, þæt hēo on flet gebēah.
Hēo him eft hraþe andlēan forgeald
grimman grāpum ond him tōgēanes fēng;
oferwearp þā wērigmōd wigena strengest,
fēþecempa, þæt hē on fylle wearð.
Ofsæt þā þone selegyst, ond hyre seax getēah
brād [ond] brūnecg; wolde hire bearn wrecan,
āngan eaferan. Him on eaxle læg
brēostnet brōden; þæt gebearh fēore,
wið ord ond wið ecge ingang forstōd.
Hæfde ðā forsiðod sunu Ecgþēowes
under gynne grund, Gēata cempa,
nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede,
herenet hearde, --- ond hālig God
gewēold wigsigor; wītig Drihten,
rodera Rædend hit on ryht gescēd
ȳdelīce, syþðan hē eft āstōd.
Geseah ðā on searwum sigeēadig bil,
ealdsweord eotenisc ecgum þȳhtig,
wigena weorðmynd; þæt [wæs] wæpna cyst,–
būton hit wæs māre ðonne ænig mon ōðer
tō beadulāce ætberan meahte,
gōd ond geatolīc, gīganta geweorc.
Hē gefēng þā fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga

without regret—Grendel's mother;
flung in the fight's hardness—he was enraged—
at the deadly foe; she fell on the floor.
Quickly she in turn paid his reward,
with her grim grip she grabbed at him;
weary he stumbled, the strongest warrior,
the foot-warrior, so that he fell.
Upon that hall-guest she drew her short sword
broad and bright-edged; she would avenge her son,
her only offspring. On his shoulder lay
his woven mail-coat; that protected his life,
against point and edge it forbade entrance.
He would have perished, Ecgtheow's son,
under the wide ground, the Geatish warrior,
if his war-corslet had not helped him,
his hard mail-coat; and holy God
wielded his victory; the wise Lord,
the heavens' Ruler, rightly decided
easily, when [Beowulf] stood up.
He saw among arms the battle-blessed sword,
ancient and giant-worked, strong in its edge,
warrior's glory, most choice of weapons,
but it was more than any other
might bear away to battle-sport,
good and well-adorned, by giants worked.
He seized the chained hilt, the bold Scylding,

hrēoh ond heorogrim, hringmǣl gebrægd
aldres orwēna, yrninga slōh,
þæt hire wið halse heard grāpode,
bānhringas bræc; bil eal ðurhwōd

fægne flǣschoman; hēo on flet gecrong,
sweord wæs swātig, secg weorce gefeh.

(Klaeber 58-9)

savage and sword-grim, he drew the ring-sword
despairing of life; angrily he struck,
grasped hard at her throat,
broke her bone-rings;[3] the sword went through
the body with joy; she fell to the floor,

the sword was bloody, in its work rejoiced.

Here the mother is variously described as "fiercely hungry," "grim and greedy," "the cursed sea-woman," with a "grim grip." This description recalls the harpy figure (Chapter 2) in her terrible hunger and greed; can there be a remote connection here through Latin literature? It seems more likely that in both the Latin and the Old English cases, this terrifying female figure is a visualization of human fear.

There is also a likeness to the ogress figure of *Grettir's Saga*: "a great she-troll" who carries "a trough in one hand and a big cleaver in the other," the most powerful monster Grettir has ever seen. "She held him so tightly to herself that he could not use either of his hands . . ." certainly a "grim grip" (Fox and Palsson 137). Certainly her behavior seems like that of the ogress. Another description of her in this passage, however, is "cursed bottom-dweller" (*grundwyrgenne* [1518]). This is glossed by Klaeber (347) as *"accursed (female) monster of the deep."* Klaeber, whose Christian interpretations occur with some

[3]vertebrae.

frequency, refers the reader to *wertho*, which he glosses as *"damnation, punishment in hell"* (423).

This leads us to the motif of Grendel and his mother as descendants of Cain. Orchard (58) states that they are of the race of Cain, as were the giants, but they themselves are not giants. Martin Puhvel speculates that the tradition of "monstrous broods descended from Cain" may be derived from "Irish ecclesiastical writings" and compares Grendel's mother to the "demonic hag" in Celtic lore (11, 18-23).

Williams feels that Grendel's role "cannot be evaluated outside of [the Cain] legend" (48). Giants and other monsters were said to eat human flesh. They lived either underground or underwater; the underwater tradition probably arose from the scriptural account of the Flood. The evil giants surviving after that event were descendants of Ham (not Cain), who reintroduced evil into the world. However, there was an idea that Cain sired the monstrous race on his own mother; "[t]he dramatic purpose of Grendel's mother in the poem is to present a certain order within the monstrous, an inverted kin . . ." (48, 34-6, 53). I shall not treat this theme further, as to me the idea of Grendel and his mother as descendants of Cain sounds like an after-the-fact explanation: Grendel and his mother are so terrible, they must be descendants of Cain. (If they are indeed descendants of Cain, they must be at least half-human, of course.)

Another suggestion, proposed by Thomas D. Hill (2001), is that Grendel and his mother, called *helrunnan* in line 163, belong to the race of *Haliurunnas*

referred to by Orosius as the ancestors of the Huns, as Jordanes says (Mierow, trans. 1915). *Haliurunnas* are women, called by Orosius *magas mulieres* "mage-women" or, more prosaically, *magnas mulieres* "big women," "giant women," who were expelled from the Getae by Filimer, son of Gadaric the Great. Wandering through the swamps, they mingled with "unclean spirits" and became the ancestresses of the Huns. We note the affinity here with water and marshlands, and the "magic" quality of the women (if *magas* is not a scribal error for *magnas*), but the Huns were a horse-riding race. Clark Hall (176, 177) gives for "hellerune" the translations *"pythoness, sorceress, Æ*[lfric]*: demon*, B[eowulf] 163" and for "helruna" *"hellish monster*, B 163." The Ælfric source is not further given.

We have so far seen a tangle of concepts: Grendel and his mother are human; they are giants or monsters; Grendel's mother is a hag (a kind of monster, but recalling the Loathly Lady [Chapter 5] in her hag avatar); Grendel's mother is a sorceress; Grendel's mother is a goddess. It appears that several motifs coalesce here: a folk motif of the hag or ogress; a kind of sympathy with the two figures, which makes them seem human or quasi-human; the motif of a witch or sorceress; finally, memory (and demonization) of a goddess figure.

We have presented above various answers to the question of *who or what* Grendel's mother is. We shall now examine the *role* of Grendel's mother in the poem and see what light this throws on her as a character. In doing this, we

need to attempt, presumptuous as it may seem, to psychoanalyze Beowulf, for his progress toward heroism is bound up with the battle against the monster.

One psychoanalytic interpretation, following Erich Neumann's (1963) line of reasoning, of Grendel's mother and Beowulf's relationship with her is that she is the Jungian Terrible Mother—"[t]he negative side of the elementary character" of the feminine, the positive elementary character being the "[b]ody-vessel and mother-child situation" (147). Neumann goes on to say, "The symbolism of the Terrible Mother draws its images predominantly from the 'inside'. . . . The reason for this is that the Terrible Female is a symbol for the unconscious. And the dark side of the Terrible Mother takes the form of monsters. . . ." (148) He compares this figure to the Valkyrie; Medusa; and the Egyptian goddess Nut, who in her avatar as "Nuit, the black night sky . . . is identified with the devouring darkness of the earth and of water" (164-5). Here again we have the coalescence of monster and goddess.

In a Freudian way, I at first saw the killing of Grendel's mother by Beowulf as a rite of passage in which Beowulf is involved in a struggle with parent figures; however, I gradually moved toward Jung and Klein in my attempt to explain what is going on in the poem. The good and the bad mother are split, as the analyst Melanie Klein points out: "[O]bject relations exist from the beginning of life, the first object being the mother's breast which to the child becomes split into a good (gratifying) and bad (frustrating) breast; this splitting results in a severance of love and hate" (175-6). Of Beowulf's real mother nothing is known,

but Hrothgar and Wealhtheow function as his adopted father and mother (Hrethel took him in as a boy and treated him as one of his own sons, but Hrothgar protected Beowulf's father once). Grendel's mother then corresponds to Wealhtheow in being a "foreign slave" (the meaning of Wealhtheow's name), an exile. Helen Damico says: "Grendel's mother and Wealhtheow exist in an antipodal relationship. They are contrapuntal . . . in the status each assumes in the poem. . . . This pairing is the most extreme example of the poet's style of characterization, the juxtaposition of opposite" (21). She adds, later in her book, that "this device of fragmentation—especially of mirroring" is "not foreign to the consciousness of the Anglo-Saxon artist. . . . The method was apparently a common device of characterization in Germanic poetry" (114).

Grendel has his own role to play as a double or "shadow" of Beowulf. In Jungian terms he represents Beowulf's "shadow," the dark side of the personality. So we have a set of pairs or triples: Beowulf and Grendel; Wealhtheow, Grendel's mother, and Beowulf's mother; Hrethel, Hrothgar, and Ecgtheow, Beowulf's father. Grendel's father is not known.

Beowulf kills Grendel, his Jungian shadow, but apparently this is not enough: he has not yet reached full maturity. He must also defeat the Terrible Mother within himself (symbolized by Grendel's mother). This killing will free him and establish his identity as an adult man. This should, according to the usual folktale pattern, lead to his marriage to the princess. But something is missing here: why does Beowulf, having vanquished the Terrible Mother, not marry? Is

the split of Good and Terrible Mother not sufficient to free him? We note that Beowulf does not achieve the triumph and the loosing of "food, energy and grace" into the world which the hero is supposed to achieve, according to Joseph Campbell (37-8). He returns successful, yes, but apparently mentally maimed.

We might try to untie this knot through "history"—Freawaru, Hrothgar's daughter, is already betrothed to someone else (lines 2024-5). Beowulf is apparently a fictional person, since his name does not alliterate with anyone else's and he has no descendants. He cannot therefore marry a "real" person and have "real" heirs. This way of getting out of our difficulty seems feeble, however. All we can say from what we read in the poem is that when Beowulf lies dying he gives Wiglaf a gift that he would have given his son if he had had a son.

We may now ask: Is the Jungian interpretation just sketched out valid? Can it explain what we need to explain about the meeting with Grendel's mother? Niles feels that it is unsatisfactory; it might not have sufficed for the Old English audience. He does say, however: "Since archetypes are prelogical, they cannot be explained rationally but surface only in symbolic form in myths, dreams, fairy tales, and the like. There is no need to prove their existence; it is enough to know that individuals have access to them through the work of interpreters" (222-4).

I do not know whom Niles means by "interpreters." I do not think we need to prove the existence of the archetype; it is accepted as such in the Euro-Semitic world. The psyche is always the same, however modified by social conditions. As we have seen, however, the Jungian interpretation is insufficient in this case. Folktale and myth do not explain everything. What is the "interpreter" of this story to do?

This question poses a dilemma. In my attempt to find a solution for it, I have had recourse to the work of Melanie Klein and Dorothy Bloch, two practitioners who through child analysis have uncovered explanations I have not found elsewhere. We shall take Kleinian theory first.

Juliet Mitchell, in her introduction to *The Selected Melanie Klein* (1987), explaining Klein's work, says of the Oedipal situation: "A primary relationship to the mother becomes culturally problematic at the stage or level when the child wants to occupy the place already filled by the father, when, in a phallic and hence competitive way, it wants to be everything for the mother, to have everything she needs to satisfy her and thus to have exclusive rights to her" (13). This refers, of course, to a male child. Is Beowulf's situation Oedipal? Does he "marry" the mother as well as kill her? Is he psychologically maimed by the encounter? (See fig. 1-4, in which the bodies of Grendel's mother and Beowulf blend sexually and seductively.)

Fig. 1-4. *Grendel's Ma & Beowulf*. Drawing by Charles Keeping, reprinted from Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Beowulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). By permission of Oxford University Press. From Osborn.

Mitchell continues: "Its own destructive feelings—emanations of the death wish—make the baby very anxious. It fears that the object on which it vents its rage . . . will retaliate. . . . As developmentally the ego becomes able to take in the whole person . . . it [the baby] continues to rage against the mother for the frustration she causes, but now, instead of fearing retaliation, it feels guilt and anxiety for the damage it itself has done in phantasy." This is what Klein calls the depressive position. In overcoming this, the baby wants to repair the destruction it has caused in "phantasy," as Mitchell spells the word. It "takes in the damaged and then restored mother, adding these new internalizations as part of the self's inner world" (20-1).

This guilt and its association with the desire to make reparation, besides being part of the child's individual development, remind me of the demonization of the old gods and goddesses at the coming of Christianity. Indeed, Marie-Louise von Franz feels that Christianity has "repressed out of existence" the pagan goddess figure, leaving only the perfect Virgin Mary (84). The ancient mother goddess, however, remains as a half-forgotten, half-unconscious figure who is at once worshiped and feared. After the conversion to Christianity, guilt must have been felt by some for the renunciation and demonization of earlier deities. These deities' internal power is still great; civilization lost much in losing them. Reparation may have been made by means of secret sacrifice to them.

Von Franz emphasizes that "an aspect of the mother goddess . . . has been very much forgotten in our civilization, but . . . exists in many primitive civilizations, and in antiquity . . . a feminine principle which contains a strange kind of severity and revengefulness. . . ." (138) If this goddess—so different from Mary, who is held to be perfect (84)—is revengeful, she could inspire great fear not only in children but in adults, and make even adults feel not only driven to revenge themselves on her but also to protect themselves from her rage by making reparation.

Klein herself writes that when a child damages a toy, she/he feels guilt, depression, and the wish to make reparation (42). In an earlier article, she writes that one component of the Oedipal situation is a "particularly strong sense of guilt." She describes a child patient who "was inwardly playing both parts: that of

the authorities who sit in judgment and that of the child who "was inwardly playing both parts: that of the authorities who sit in judgment and that of the child who is punished" (61, 63). This may be the kind of mental process that Beowulf goes through after his killing of Grendel's mother: "I killed the monster; I'm good/I killed my mother; I'm bad." Beowulf, as we have seen, does not achieve the complete triumph required of the hero. He only achieves complete reparation at the end of his life, when he kills the dragon and acquires its hoard—which is at once buried in his tomb! But all we see after the battle with Grendel's mother is the triumphant return.

Elsewhere Klein writes, in a 1928 article called "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict":

> Not only by means of the anal frustrations which she [the mother] inflicts [in toilet training] does she pave the way for the castration complex: in terms of psychic reality she *is* also already the *castrator*. . . . This dread of the mother is so overwhelming because there is combined with it an intense dread of castration by the father. . . . [The boy feels] dread of his mother whom he intended to rob of the father's penis, her children and her female sexual organs. (74-5)

Beowulf has robbed Grendel's mother of her child. In undertaking the task of killing her, he may fear a symbolic castration by her and possibly also by Hrothgar, who will, to say the least, be very upset if Grendel's mother is *not* killed. After the killing, as I have suggested earlier, Beowulf feels both relief at the removal of the dreaded Terrible Mother and guilt at the symbolic killing of his mother.

Another analyst, Dorothy Bloch, in her fascinating book *So the Witch Won't Eat Me*, explains further: The child feels guilty about everything bad that happens in the family. The "igniting factor" is the child's own feelings of rage. The child's aggressive feelings are forbidden both by the parents and by the child her/himself, who thinks that aggressive feelings have "a devastating power." The child then fears retribution (5).

The hope of eventually winning the parents' love is "the foundation of the psychic structure." The child hopes to be loved as soon as she/he becomes worthy of love (11). One way of becoming worthy of love, of course, is killing dangerous monsters. Bloch points out that the terror directed onto monsters preserves an idealized image of the parents (12). But what if the monsters you have killed are doubles of yourself and your parent?

This has perhaps gone too far from what we can read in the lines of the poem, but this digression—a semipsychoanalysis of Beowulf—may have value in our struggle to understand who Grendel's mother really is. I find myself returning to Davidson's suggestion that she is a goddess, a hunting-goddess, a goddess of the water, a Ruler of the Wild. We may see her also as a goddess of death, like the Nordic Hel, described by Davidson (178) as "a loathsome female figure symbolizing physical death" and ruler of the underworld. A goddess of death may be both loathsome and transcendent: Davidson reminds us of the Indian Kali, "terrifying in appearance, black or dark in colour, usually naked,

adorned with severed heads or arms . . . her lips smeared with blood" (178), who is nevertheless adored by many.

If Grendel's mother is a goddess, she has supreme right to avenge the killing of animals under her protection (stags, water creatures) and of her son. Killing a goddess would be an act of sacrilege, yet the killing of one who has destroyed allies and endangered your whole group is a noble act. If you have killed the goddess of death, you may have stepped outside the human realm altogether. Beowulf will never be the same again.

The role of Grendel's mother in the poem, then, is that of the Terrible Mother located firmly in the psyche, that of a dangerous monster who must be destroyed, *and* that of a goddess whose killing is sacrilege. Folklore, myth, and religion coalesce here.

Why does Grendel's mother appear overtly as a monster and a subhuman, cannibalistic hag—a goddess in troll's clothing? The conflict of Christianity and paganism coalesces here: It is sacrilege to kill a goddess of paganism, but a pagan goddess becomes to Christians only a monster, whom it is acceptable and even necessary to kill. This is added to the psychological split of Good/Terrible Mother and the struggle to rid oneself of the Terrible Mother. The act of killing this threefold being could induce a lasting psychic conflict, as it seems to do in Beowulf. Killing her is threatening, as she is a dominant female figure in a male-bonded society.

How, finally, can Grendel's mother be seen as a Wild Woman? Chance points out that she is "described in human and social terms: inversion of the Anglo-Saxon ideal of woman as both monstrous and masculine"—as *sinnige secg* 'sinful warrior,' *mihtig manscada* 'mighty evil-doer,' *gryrelicne grundhyrde* 'terrible keeper of the abyss' (249; the translations of the various terms, however, are mine). This Wild Woman is infinitely more than a particular being in conflict with established convention. She means to destroy. She is both less and more than human, transcending and descending from the human, the Terrible Mother in her most archetypal aspect.

CHAPTER 2
HARPIES, SIRENS, AND MERMAIDS

Modern readers know the mermaid as a beautiful, fish-tailed maiden who swims in the seas or sits on a rock or on the shore, singing and combing her long, flowing hair. Humans often fall in love with her, or she with them, or both. They seem less likely to remember that stories of mermaids often end with the mermaid bride, who cannot live on land, returning to the sea.

The mermaid as she appears in medieval literature is a type of the Wild Woman as Seductress: she is willful, beautiful, lustful, and deceitful. The sweet mermaid we know from Hans Christian Andersen and from the films *Splash* and *The Little Mermaid* is a modern transformation that omits half the truth. Janus-faced, the classical mermaid is the epitome of the clichéd feminine: she is both sweet and deceitful, lovable and dangerous. She is at the core of a conception of the feminine that has endured through the ages.

To understand the concepts of harpy, siren, and mermaid, which play a large part in folklore and interest us for the light they throw on concepts of woman as threatening or seducing, we need to understand medieval ideas on female sexuality. These ideas, inherited from Greco-Roman culture, included a perception of women as profoundly sexual. Women "embodied sexuality"; their sexuality was "open and receptive," as Joyce Salisbury (84, 85-7) says. This idea of woman as always receptive may sound more like a projection of male

desires than a description of female being, but the mermaid in medieval times was seen as a supreme seductress, luring men to their doom—that is, to forbidden sexual experience in which they might "drown." She was certainly unchaste. Men feared the temptation represented by seductive women, and the mermaid came to be a symbol of that temptation, as well as of the deceitfulness associated with women. As Carl Jung says in his description of the mother archetype, she combines "the magic authority of the female" on the positive side with, on the negative side, "anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate" ("Archetypes," 16).

Although the mermaid is not portrayed in any significant text, I shall begin with two medieval descriptions. The first of these is found in the Middle English *Physiologus*, a manuscript written in Norfolk about 1300 (the edition quoted is that of Hanneke Wirtjes, 1991). In this text we read:

In ðe se senden selcuðes manie.	In the sea there are many marvels.
Ðe mereman[1] is a meiden ilike;	The merman is like a maiden:
On brest & on bodi oc (al ðus ȝe is bunden):	In breast and in body but (thus she is bound):
Fro ðe noule niðerwarð ne is ȝe (no man like)	From the navel downward she is like no man
Oc fis to ful iwis mið finnes waxen.	But [from] fish grown to bird truly with fins.
Ðis wunder wuneð in wankel stede	This wonder lives in an insecure place
ðer ðe water sinkeð.	where the water sinks.
Sipes ȝe sinkeð & scaðe ðus werkeð.	She sinks ships and thus causes injury.

[1] In early English, "man" could refer to both male and female human beings; "mereman" is thus "a human being of the sea," although mer-people are really only half human.

Mirie ȝe singeð, ðis mere,[2] & haueð manie stefnes,
Manie & sille, oc it (ben wel ille.
Sipmen here) steringe forȝeten for hire stefninge,
Slumeren & slepen & to late waken:
Ðe sipes sinken mitte suk, ne cumen he nummor up.

Oc wise men & warre aȝen cunen chare,
Ofte arn atbrosten mid he[re]* best ouel.
He hauen told of ðis mere, ðat ðus uniemete,
Half man & half fis,[3] sum ðing tokneð bi ðis.

'Significacio'

Fele men hauen ðe tokning
Of ðis forbisnede ðing:
Wiðuten weren [sepes] fel;
Wiðinnen arn he wulues al.
He speken godcundhede
& wikke is here dede.
Here dede is al vncuð
Wið ðat spekeð here muð.
Twifold arn on mode:
He sweren bi ðe rode,
Bi ðe sunne & bi ðe mone
& he ðe leȝen sone.
Mið here saȝe & mið here song
He ðe swiken ðerimong:
Ðin aȝte wið swiking,
Ði soule wið lesing.
(*Modern English Physiologus* 15-16)

Merrily she sings, this mermaid, and has many voices,
Many and sonorous, but they are bad.
Shipmen forget their steering because of her voices,
Slumber and sleep and too late wake:
The ships sink in the middle of a sucking action, nor do they ever come up again.
But wise men and cautious turn back,

Often are escaped with all the strength they have
They have told of this mermaid, who thus, grotesque one,
Half man and half fish, betokens something by this.

Signification

Many men have the meaning
Of this allegorical thing:
Without they wear sheep's skin;
Within they are all wolves.
They speak [in] pious talk
And wicked is their deed.
Their deed is all unacquainted
With what their mouths speak.
They are twofold in behavior:
They swear by the cross,
By the sun and by the moon
And they [will] deceive thee soon.
With their words and with their song
They betray thee meanwhile:
Thy possessions with betrayal,
They soul with lying.
(Translation AHL)

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[2]A short form for "mereman."

[3]The "half man [person] and half fish" nature of the mermaid described here leads to the warning of the *"Significacio"* against the danger posed by half-human beings.

The bestiary genre goes back to Aristotle, whose approach is scientific. In the Middle English *Physiologus*, however, "Nature has become a metaphor, a book to be studied by all good Christians" (lxix). As usual in bestiaries, the animal or half-human creature is used as a religious example: The nature of the creature is an allegory for the danger to religion that must be warned against. In this case the poet warns us against the deceitful nature, not only of mer-people, but also of human "wolves in sheep's clothing" who may try to deceive the reader and lead her/him into unchristian ways. Appearances are misleading. "Many men have the meaning" *(tokning)* means that they betoken or show forth the "meaning" of the mermaid, the allegorical *(forbisnede)* thing.

Our second description comes from a thirteenth-century Latin account attributed to Bartholomew Anglicus and quoted by Gwen Benwell and Arthur Waugh in their book *Sea Enchantress* (1961). The mermaid is described in terms of her appearance and characteristic behavior (translated by Stephen Batman, *Batman upon Bartholome* [1582]), as follows:

> The mermaid is a sea beast wonderly shapen, and draweth shipmen to peril by sweetness of song. The Gloss on Is. [Isaiah] xii sayth that sirens are Serpents with crests. And some men say, that they are fishes of the sea in likeness of women. Some men feign that there are three Sirens some-deal maidens and some-deal fowls with claws and wings, and one of them singeth with voice, and another with a pipe, and the third with a harp, and they please so shipmen, with likeness of song, that they draw them to peril and to ship-breach, but the truth is, that they were strong whores, that drew men that passed by them to poverty and to mischief. And Physiologus saith it is a beast of the sea wonderfully shapen as a maid from the navel upward and a fish from the navel downward, and this wonderfull beast is glad and merry in tempest, and sad

> and heavy in fair weather. With sweetness of song this beast maketh shipmen to sleep, and when she seeth that they are asleep, she goeth into the ship, and ravisheth [seizes, captures] which [whomever] she may take with her, and bringeth him into a dry place, and maketh him first lie by her, and if he will not or may not, then she slayeth him and eateth his flesh.

This is the typical mermaid, singing beautifully but deceitful and (in Bartholomew Anglicus's account) aggressive, homicidal, and cannibalistic. What is the historical background of this strange being?

The common notion that this legendary figure is based on sightings of manatees and dugongs is unsatisfactory to Benwell and Waugh and also to me. The mermaid is too firmly rooted in folklore (and too closely related to her ancestors, the harpy and the siren) to be derived from sailors' chance sightings of water animals. To understand her we must find her origins, and we may take a pseudo-Darwinian approach in this search backward in time. This approach can lead us back to the harpy of classical times, her evolution into the siren, and that of the siren into the mermaid—the Babylonian fish goddess coalesced with the siren, and the mermaid crossed with the animal (often a seal or swan) wife. To understand this better, we shall first look at some pictorial representations.

The earliest figures resembling sirens or winged women seem to be the *keres* or death spirits found on Greek grave jars and described in a fascinating way by Jane Ellen Harrison (35, 43, 165-86). A grave jar (fig. 2-1, Harrison's Fig. 7) shows "two winged Keres (or souls)" fluttering upward from it, a third emerging and a fourth diving back into it. This is, Harrison says, a comment on the

Anthesteria or spring festival, when souls departed. (There was a similar festival at Rome, the Lemuria, when family ghosts were exhorted to depart from the house.)

Fig. 2-1. Keres in Greek vase-painting.

Why are the Keres or souls winged? Harrison conjectures that "the notion of the soul as a human-faced bird is familiar in Egyptian, but rare in Greek, art. . . . To conceive of the soul as a bird escaping from the mouth is a fancy so natural and beautiful that it has arisen among many peoples" (200-201). However, according to John Pollard (141), there is no evidence that the Greeks ever thought of the soul as a bird. It is possible that the Keres are winged not because they themselves are souls but because they carry off souls to the realm of the dead (see below). John Cherry (174) describes them as "black winged female creatures with huge white teeth and pointed talons, who tear corpses apart and drink the blood of the wounded and the dead." He relies on the *Iliad* for this. If the Keres descended to the battlefield like the Norse Valkyries, they needed wings.

However that may be, the Keres soon became figures of fear in the popular mind. They were "dreaded as sources of evil . . . like a sort of personified bacilli, [they] engendered corruption and pollution . . ." according to Harrison (165-6). Some of them were said to cause nightmares, blindness, madness, and even blisters. Harrison cites a poem attributed to Stobaeus that mentions them:

> . . . Drive far away the disastrous
> Keres, they who destroy the herd of the vulgar and fetter
> All things around with curses manifold. Many and dreadful
> Shapes do they take to deceive. . . . (168)

From being souls of the dead or death-spirits, the Keres seem to have developed into snatchers of souls (perhaps from the belief that souls of the dead return for the living). They thus fuse with Harpies, whose name derives from Greek *harpazein*, to snatch, and to which we now turn.

Fig. 2-2. Harpies in Greek vase-painting.

Fig. 2-3. Harpy as Gorgon.

On a vase-painting from the Berlin Museum (fig. 2-2, Harrison's Fig. 18), the winged demons are clearly represented as Harpies (*harpeuia*) although they form part of the scene of the slaying of Medusa, which, according to Harrison, shows that they are Gorgons. On another vase-painting from Berlin (fig. 2-3, Harrison's Fig. 19), a Gorgon with "the typical Gorgon's head and protruding tongue [performs] the function of a Harpy, i.e., of a Snatcher" (177).

What is the nature of harpies? The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes the harpy as

> a fabulous creature, probably a wind spirit. The presence of harpies as tomb figures, however, makes it possible that they were also conceived of as ghosts [note this link with the Keres]. In Homer's *Odyssey* they were winds that carried people away. Elsewhere, they were sometimes connected with the powers of the underworld. . . . (*Micropaedia*, 15th ed., 1992, 717)

These early Harpies were in no way disgusting. Later, however, especially in the legend of Jason and the Argonauts, they were represented as birds with the faces of women, horribly foul and loathsome. Accompanying this

encyclopedia article is an illustration of a "Harpy from a tomb frieze from the acropolis of Xanthus, Asia Minor, c. 500 BC" in the British Museum (fig. 2-4); this shows the harpy as a girl with braids or curls, bird's wings and feet, not unlike a modern angel! The bird identification may begin here.

Fig. 2-4. Harpy from a tomb frieze.

The harpies we moderns know, however, seem to have developed from Virgil, who describes them as "horribly foul and loathsome" creatures who snatch food. In Book III of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas and his men settle down for a feast upon the beach:

> But instantly, grotesquely whirring down,
> The Harpies were upon us from the hills
> With deafening beat of wings. They trounced our meat,
> Defiling everything they touched with filth,
> And gave an obscene squawk amid the stench. (309-13; 73)

They are described a few lines earlier as follows:

> ...flying things
> With young girls' faces, but foul ooze below,
> Talons for hands, pale famished nightmare mouths. . . . (299-301)

Here one may surmise an equation of these bird-women with real birds—vultures—associated with death. This would have aided the Keres' evolution from souls of the dead, to soul-snatchers, to more realistic and carnal food-snatchers. The Harpies were seen as disgusting creatures because they were associated with death and decay. Beryl Rowland remarks that

> the wings and avian body symbolize feminine, nurturing characteristics; the talons represent an infantile projection of destructive impulses which converts the maternal figure into a cruel predator. . . . For this reason nearly all the great mother-goddesses had birdlike features. Horapollo described the Egyptian mother-goddess as a vulture. . . . She possessed traits sometimes ascribed to the Harpies—she was made pregnant by the wind, and she had the gift of prophecy. She was also death-bringing and corpse-devouring. . . . Yet references to the Harpies' flowing hair and virginal faces as well as subsequent illustrations of firm, seductive breasts or soft avian curves suggestive of fecundity point to their dual role. (1987:159-60)

In another publication (1978:76) Rowland cites a Greek monument on which a harpy holds a child in her arms in a suckling position and at the same time clings to the child's legs with her talons. This is the nursing mother who arouses the child's anger by weaning, and the child projects onto the mother—the source of anger and deprivation—its own anger.[4]

To the Greeks the siren came to be represented as a bird-woman similar to the harpy, with the head and bust of a woman and the body and claws of a bird. Homer did not describe the sirens, which are only voices in the *Odyssey*;

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[4]Here again, as in the Grendel's mother chapter, we see the good/bad mother split and the evolution of the Terrible Mother.

nevertheless, early Greek artists always portrayed the sirens of Homer as woman-faced birds. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the sirens are daughters of Achelous, the river-god, who were turned into birds (Benwell and Waugh 41-3).

Fig. 2-5. Harpy/siren, north side, church of Saint-Etiene, Cahors (from Benton 1996:154).

As Janetta Benton (1992:36) delightfully remarks, the harpy "lacks the siren's surface charm." In spite of the similarity in form, it is a little difficult to trace the evolution of the harpy into the siren. Nevertheless, I do believe that they are connected and that the physical loathsomeness of the harpy is transformed into the moral dangerousness of the siren, as the harpy's snatching of souls and of food is transformed into the siren's snatching of men whom she captures or eats (see Bartholomew Anglicus above). Both are associated with water, Erich Neumann's "primordial womb of life" (47), the sea or the seashore. Both, as long as the siren is a bird-woman, hover above men. Rowland does not

see harpies and sirens as really so different, remarking that "the siren as incuba [female demon] is the lewd demon of the nightmare" (1978:155). Both are associated with water, as birds fly above water or swim on it (Baring and Cashford 58-9). Both are connected with death; finally, both are frustrating mothers and terrifying demons. (What may be a transitional figure is a gargoyle from Cahors in France, fig. 2-5).

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* (*Micropaedia*, 15th ed., 1992) describes the siren as

> a creature half bird and half woman who lured sailors to destruction by the sweetness of her song. . . . In art they appeared first as birds with the heads of women, later as women, sometimes winged, with bird legs.
>
> The Sirens seem to have evolved from two elements: a primitive tale of the perils of early exploration combined with an Oriental image of a bird-woman. Anthropologists explain the Oriental image as a soul-bird—*i.e.*, a winged ghost that stole the living to share its fate. In that respect the Sirens had affinities with the Harpies. (843-4)

It is not clear what a "primitive tale of the perils of early exploration" could have been: possibly simply a tale of welcoming maidens from some tribe rowing out to meet early explorers' boats or at least singing from the shore.

As for the personality of the siren, she has the same dual nature as the harpy, being lovely (as the harpy was in her earliest appearances) and

loathsome (Dante's Siren in the *Purgatorio* comes to mind), seductive and deceiving, apparently life-giving but in reality dealing death.[5]

How did the siren evolve into the mermaid, similar in character but fish-tailed rather than bird-winged? Probably two legends crossed here, as the siren coalesced into the Babylonian fish-gods and goddesses. The first merman is Ea, or Oannes, a Babylonian god, who is sometimes shown as fish-tailed. He is known to have been worshiped from about 1900 BC to about 200 BC, according to Michael Jordan's *Encyclopedia of Gods* (72). Ea was the god of the sea and its spirits and demons, so it is natural that he became associated with a being of the sea or at least of the seashore. His wife was Damkina, Queen of the Waters. They had six sons, all fish-tailed, and a daughter, Nina, whose sign was the House of the Fish. There was another fish-tailed god of legend, Dagon of the Philistines; some identified the biblical Noah, as well as Dagon, with Oannes and made him, too, fish-tailed. Damkina and Nina, Oannes' wife and daughter, were probably fish-tailed, as was Atargatis or Derceto, a Semitic moon-goddess (Benwell and Waugh 23-9). In most of Atargatis's cult centers there was a sacred lake filled with fish. Her cult reached Egypt by the third century BC, and she is mentioned by Hellenistic Greek writers (30). The bird-siren gave way only slowly to the fish-tailed mermaid; according to Edmond Faral, "the fish tail starts

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[5]Is it possible that the harpy and the angel have the same origin but diverge, one becoming loathsome and one semidivine?

appearing in the late seventh or eighth century" in medieval bestiaries (Wirtjes lxxxviii). The fish element doubtless comes from the image of fish as representing fecundity because of their enormous number of eggs and because of the belief that life originated in the depths of the sea (as in fact, of course, it did), as found in Charbonneau-Lassy's *Bestiary of Christ* (295). Helen King remarks that women are often associated with water and that Greek medical writers thought women were thought to be wetter than men:

> Because their spongy flesh retained more fluid from their diet, menstruation was necessary to remove the excess. The sea is then, in a sense, the female element, and the tradition that the presence of women is unlucky on board ship can be seen as expressing this belief; if the sea is female, the ship which masters it should be crewed by men. (152)

Transitional forms ("missing links?") between the bird-siren and fish-tailed mermaid include beings with both wings and fish tails. T.H. White, attempting to trace this evolutionary stage, states, "The true Sirens were not mermaids" (135); yet his illustration, from a twelfth-century bestiary, shows a buxom lass with wings, eagle-like feet, and a fish's tail. (Since the wings are around her waist, it is not clear how she could have flown.)

Other variants include serpent or half-serpent forms. White's translation tells us, "[T]here are in Arabia certain white snakes with wings which are known as SYRENS" (181); Melusine is a half-serpent (O'Clery 117-25), and some sirens have a serpent's tail, identifying them with Satan and his works. Indeed, the serpent of Eden is sometimes seen as female, in which case two women

Fig. 2-6. *The temptation of Eve.* Speculum Humanae Salvationis, *London, British Library, M.S. Harley 4996. fol. 4v (detail). (Reprinted with permission of the British Library).* From Flores 178.

would be responsible for the Falll This representation begins with Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* in the last half of the twelfth century. Comester felt that this was reasonable "since similar things attract one another," that is, Eve and the virgin-like serpent (Flores 167-8, 173, 179) (See fig. 2-6, Flores' Figure 2, from the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, written around 1324 [176].) Nana C. Flores adds: "On some representations [of sirens], the scaly fishtail looks suspiciously like a scaly serpent's tail except for the fin at the end, and even Romanesque bird sirens (generally identified as harpies) often bore a

serpent's tail" (173). This links all three of our characters. The beauty (and lovely French braid) of the female serpent is striking and resembles that of the mermaid (except that the latter has long flowing hair); the character of the female serpent is even more reprehensible than the mermaid's.

The mermaid, then, has a long history, a history not confined to classical tradition and continuations of that tradition represented by texts like the Middle English *Physiologus* and Bartholomew Anglicus's commentary. Beginning, perhaps, with a relationship to creatures of the air, in further developments she becomes a creature capable of entering into relationships with human beings. This development, as Barbara Leavy demonstrates, accompanies her association with a folklore figure known as the animal bride or swan maiden. Leavy states that mermaid tales "frequently form subgroups among swan maiden narratives . . ." as the woman (swan maiden, mermaid, etc.) is "rescued from the wild" and is tamed and "fitted for marriage with men" (44, 45). The swan maiden story, Leavy says, is found "in virtually every comer of the world" because in most cultures "woman was a symbolic outsider, was the other . . . and marriage demanded an intimate involvement in a world never quite her own" (2). It seems that man deals with his fear of woman by making her in his mind at least partly animal; the female equivalent of this process, of course, is found in tales such as "Beauty and the Beast" or "The Frog Prince" in which the girl, fearing male roughness and sexuality, finds that at least some male beasts, when kissed, become princes. Leavy says that to undo the effects of sexual repression the

man must have intercourse with an animal or loathly lady, who then turns into a beautiful woman (233); the kiss given by the Knight to the Loathly Lady (see Chapter 5) or by a girl to the frog or beast prince may have the same effect.

Collections like Helen O'Clery's *Mermaid Reader* are rife with tales of mermaids who marry mortal men but long for the sea and eventually return to it. Some of them even have children (though how this can be done, since the sexual organs are in the fish part of the body, remains obscure). We may recall the English folk song "The Eddystone Light":

> My father was the keeper of the Eddystone Light,
> He married a mer-my-aid one night,
> Out of the match came children three,
> Two were fish and the other was me.

The mermaid, then, has the double nature of a castrated woman (since the human female sexual organs are gone) and a non-castrated one (the fish tail stands for the penis). Thus she both stirs up and allays men's fears of castration. And, as Wolfgang Lederer (232-5) points out, man's fear of woman derives from the incest taboo and the yearning for a return to the mother, who is not really the actual mother but the mother-archetype, the unconscious-in-fact, the Goddess. Lederer cites legends about bottomless lakes in which a water spirit (an Ondine, a naiad, etc.) lives. Such creatures (and mermaids can also live in inland waters) are a threat to men: a man tempted by these spirits may be drawn down into the water and never reemerge.

This has been, perhaps, a long preamble to a question: Can the mermaid be considered to fall within the class of Wild Women? Does her nature as inhabitant of the air or of the deep preclude her consideration here? My answer is that her half-animal, harpy-like nature (throwback to an earlier evolutionary stage) and her seductiveness and unchastity characterize her as wild.

The mermaid of medieval and earlier times, then, was a danger to men. But she (or he?) could also, as at least two early sightings demonstrate, be a harmless creature. A "merman" (without a fish tail, of course) was caught in a net at Orford, Suffolk, in 1197. He looked like a man, but could not talk and lived on raw fish, and eventually fled back to the sea. Similarly, a "mermaid" was found in a broken dike in Edam, Holland, after a storm. She learned to do domestic work but never to speak, and lived fifteen years after she was found (Benwell and Waugh 74, 81). Possibly these were autistic persons, whose social ignorance made them incapable of living as ordinary humans do.

A greater virtue even than innocence was the mermaid's longing for a human soul. Benwell and Waugh (61-2) tell us of the myth of Liban, the Irish mermaid, said to have been captured in Ireland in the year 558. She was originally a human girl who prayed to be changed into a salmon, but the prayer was only half effective. She swam the seas for three hundred years, and eventually was captured, baptized by St. Comgall, and died, presumably having reacquired humanity and a soul. Another mermaid was said to have visited a monk living on Iona, begging for a human soul. The monk said that first she must

give up the sea. She was unable to do so, and swam away weeping. Her tears were transformed into greenish-gray pebbles, still found on the shores of Iona and called "mermaid's tears" (63).

Leavy has well summed up the nature of the harpy/siren/mermaid as well as the animal bride: "The wild woman appears in many shapes, ranging from loathly lady to beautiful temptress, and virtually all supernatural female folklore characters are imbued with features of the wild woman, that is, the animal side of the human being" (221). The dangerous and even unpleasant nature of the harpy/siren/mermaid in the Middle Ages may be related to fear of the once-giving but later withholding mother, but it is also the product of a defense mechanism: woman, who is so feared, and loved, and toward whom feelings are so ambivalent, can best be dealt with by making her half-human—an easy way of making her other, and therefore not to be considered an equal or indeed someone who has to be really encountered at all. She can be explained away as animal, supernatural, or even nonexistent; she can be Christianized by the myth of her longing for a human soul; or, finally, she can be made less dangerous by being made sweet and inoffensive. As an animal bride, she cannot fit into human life or reconcile herself to it, and must return to the sea. The mermaid at last comes to seem more pitiable than threatening, and yet we must remember that even in the film *Splash*, the man who loves the beautiful mermaid goes down to the sea with her: The half-animal woman is forever alienated and alienating, and therefore forever a danger to normal life.

CHAPTER 3
BÉROUL'S ISEUT

One of the characterizing features of the Wild Woman and Man was the ability to live in the natural world. We find that Tristan and Iseut, the two famed lovers best known to us as Tristan and Isolde, were during a critical time of their development as lovers able to do this. As Béroul tells their story in his *Romance of Tristan*, the two live happily in the forest after fleeing from the court of King Mark, Iseut's husband. I am therefore, for this and other reasons, suggesting that Iseut be considered an example of the type (though I have other reasons for so considering her, as will be seen).

I have chosen to use the Iseut story of Béroul, a French author, rather than that of Sir Thomas Malory, for a number of reasons. First, Béroul antedates Malory by three centuries. Second, the Iseut of Malory (spelled "Isoud") is far from wild. She is a pleasant and gracious lady who performs a noble action in preventing Tristan from killing the pagan Sir Palomides: "[B]ecause he is not christened I would be loth that he should die a Saracen" (1:358-9). Most importantly, after Iseut is punished for unchastity by being put into a "lazar-cote" or hut for lepers, Tristan rescues her and brings "her into a forest with a fair manor," in which he lives with her (366)—hardly the rough life described by Béroul. In the latter's poem, after the lovers flee:

> They slept that night in the forest of Morrois on a hillside . . . [Tristan] cut branches to make a leafy bower and Yseut covered the ground thickly with leaves. . . . Governal [the squire] knew how to cook and made a good fire from some dry wood. . . . They had no milk or salt in this lodging. . . . They were a long time in the wood. Each morning they had to leave the place where they had spent the night. . . . They were leading a rough and hard life, but they loved each other with such true love that neither felt any hardship because of the other. (76-8)

While romantic enough, this hardly describes life in "a forest with a fair manor."

Malory omits the dramatic scene at the ford (see below) that in Béroul precedes the lovers' escape into the forest. In Malory, Isoud is removed from the forest manor by Mark, eventually escapes again, and lives with Tristan at Lancelot's castle, Joyous Gard. Although she is an adulteress, her life and behavior are those of a courtly lady. "To speak of her beauty, bounty, and mirth, and of her goodness, we saw never her match as far as we have ridden and gone," two knights report to Queen Guenever. Guenever replies, "[S]o saith all the people that have seen her and spoken with her" (2:171). When Tristan prepares to go to court for Pentecost, Isoud refuses to accompany him, "for then shall I be spoken of shame among all queens and ladies of estate" (2:231). If Tristan does not go to the feast, she says, other knights will make fun of him for "cowering" in a castle with a lady and not coming to the king's feast. "It is pity I have my life," she says, "that I will hold so noble a knight as ye are from his worship" (2:231).

Isoud is kept at Joyous Gard three years, being finally brought to Mark by Tristan "by means of treaties," at which time Mark slays Tristan (2:467-8). This is

Malory's last mention of Isoud. It can be seen that Malory's Isoud is a court lady who never really lives in the wild.

We return now to Béroul's poem, considered by its editor, Alan Fedrick, "the oldest of the *Tristan* romances" (12n.). First we must answer the question: Why use a French work in a study of English medieval characters? My reason is that Béroul's presentation of the internationally renowned character Iseut fits well into the Wild Woman concept and is far more interesting than the Malory presentation discussed above. Further, as Jacques Chocheyras (171) states, the manuscript is from England; one of its owners was Antoine de Chalfont and Chalfont was the name of a Buckinghamshire family. Hence, Béroul's work must have been known in England; J.A. Burrow (4), in fact, feels that it was probably composed for audiences in England. Also, although Béroul seems to have been from southern Normandy, his knowledge of Cornwall shows that he may really have visited the Tristan-Iseut area (Chocheyras 171, 187-8).

Like most of our Wild Women, Iseut defies convention; not only does she do that, but she slyly assumes the appearance of convention. In contrast with Malory's Isoud, she is not just a gracious lady who happens to be overcome by a love potion, but a crafty and deceptive character. She is an excellent example of the Untamed, and indeed the Untamable, Wild Woman. While she never repents her adultery with Tristan, at King Mark's court she plays the virtuous wife, feigning submissiveness. Although she spends a brief time in the forest, this time sequence does play a part in the definition of her character, and perhaps we

might say that the wilderness of the forest is an exteriorization of her wild character (see fig. 3-1). But what is most important to Iseut's self-realization is the ability she acquires to define herself in opposition to established norms. As Peter S. Noble says, she has skill with words, acting ability, and an "ability to think on her feet" (20).

Fig. 3-1. Louis Rhead (1857-1926). *La Belle Isault, Tristan and Isolde*, 3 Nov. 2001 <http://www.angelfire.com/me2/legends/images/rhead1.2.jpg>.

In medieval Christianity, the ideal woman was asexual, or rather stripped of her sexuality (the virgin martyr) or (next best) chaste, having sexual relations only with her husband. Iseut fulfills neither of these requirements. She is a bold,

assertive, fighting, convention-breaking creature. She constantly manipulates people by her ingenious "lies," which are really truths expressed in such a way as to make lies the truth. This kind of strategy can be linked to the "female mimesis" described by E. Jane Burns (1993:207-8). Burns feels that Iseut, while she "[defines] herself within the masculinized traditions of chivalry, courtliness, and feudal jurisprudence that construct [the medieval context] . . . [remains] significantly outside them" (208). With this mimesis, she manages to get by socially at court. She is certainly highly intelligent, in fact more so than Tristan, as she is the one who hatches the plan to have Tristan disguise himself as a leper while she takes an oath that is nothing but one of her adroitly disguised truthful "lies." She recognizes that she cannot take an oath whose wording is devised by someone else, but if she herself offers the oath, she can word it as she wishes. In an important incident, she, on trial for adultery, asks Tristan, disguised as a leper, to carry her over a muddy ford (Noble 20-21):

> "Heavens, leper, you are fat!" [she says]. "Turn your face this way and your back this way. I will get on like a boy."
>
> Then the leper smiled and bent his back. The queen mounted. Everyone was watching, kings and counts. Leaning on his crutch he raised one foot and kept the other firmly on the ground. Several times he pretended to fall, and looked as though he was in great pain. The fair Yseut rode on his back with her legs round him. . . .
>
> [Accused of adultery, she says:] "[M]y lords . . . by the mercy of God I see holy relics here before me. Listen now to what I swear, and may it reassure the king: so help me God and St. Hilary, and by these relics, this holy place, the relics that are not here and all the relics there are in the world, I swear that no man ever came between my thighs except the leper who carried me on his back over the ford and my husband, King Mark." (136, 141-2)

In this episode, and elsewhere in the poem, both Tristan and Iseut are tricky opportunists with very little moral sense (Tristan is fully cognizant of Iseut's stratagems). They know that they can be considered guilty by the Christian church, but they are more worried about Mark's honor—and about their own places at his court—than about God. They call on God freely, even while violating his laws, and feel that he is on their side. An example of this is the episode of Tristan's leap. Tristan, condemned to be burnt to death, asks to be let into the chapel for a moment's prayer:

> Tristan did not move slowly. He went to the window behind the altar, pulled it towards him with his right hand and leaped through the opening. He would rather jump than be burnt before that assembly. My lords, there was a big, wide stone in the middle of those rocks [of the ledge on which the chapel is built]; Tristan jumped on to it very easily. The wind caught his clothes and prevented him from crashing to the ground. . . . God had shown him great mercy. (68-9)

Iseut, too, after the incident at the ford, invokes both God and St. Hilary (as well as all the relics in the world) when she swears that "no man ever came between my thighs except the leper who carried me on his back over the ford and my husband, King Mark" (142). The joke here, as Pierre Jonin tells us, is that St. Hilary condemned lying, though with exceptions (343, 345-6). This must have been intentional on the part of Béroul, who is usually on the side of the lovers without hiding their faults from himself or the audience.

Fedrick emphasizes (18-20) that the role played by God in Béroul's story is "both active and ambiguous." God in this story is remarkably flexible; he is

often invoked as a support for the lovers' illicit and deceptive actions. Why is he helping them in this way? Is the action of the magic potion a satisfactory justification for their actions? And why do they continue their affair after the potion's effect has expired?

Béroul states that the potion was made to be effective for "three years of love" (95). The affair does not end with the potion's expiration, I feel, because by now the love between Tristan and Iseut has become part of their characters and their defiance of the court and its social rules. Iseut does enjoy court life as long as she can have things her own way, even if that means occasionally fleeing from court. The game of deceit is a delight to her. The potion in Béroul is perhaps never more than a literary trick; it may be derived from a more seriously romantic plot device in some earlier version of the story. There is another explanation for the continuance of the affair, however (see below).

With regard to the attitude to God here shown both by Béroul and his characters, we may cite George Duby. Duby feels that there was a psychological shift at the beginning of the thirteenth century: "[I]n the great shift that brought about the internalization of religion, they [knights] gradually learned that rites count for little when acts and intentions are not blameless" (283). The world of the poem is a world existing prior to the internalization of religion: Tristan and Iseut seem to think that they can get away with anything as long as they at least pretend to stick to outward forms. The externalized concept of "honor" is more important to them than the state of their souls, and yet honor is not all-important

to them either. God seems to have no importance except as he is called in to help them in their escapades (and I call them escapades, because the lovers enjoy them so much—even if their adventures are death-defying). The possibility that God might actually punish them, or that they might suffer remorse later, does not seem to bother them. The Iseut of Béroul would not understand the Isoud of Malory, who worries about the state of Sir Palomides' soul; what would it matter to her? God is external.

What seems to be really important to Tristan and Iseut is their passionate love and sexual desires. In a general sense this might be considered a cause of "wildness." They live in a society in transition between externalized and internalized religion, as we have just seen. Perhaps they are becoming "extinct." But I do not think their wildness lies solely in this; they are wild both because they find they can live outside of "civilized" society (in the forest) and because they choose to live in ways that satisfy their elemental sexual desires. What makes Iseut's wildness apparent is the visibility of its contrast with what is expected of her. As the wife of Mark, she could be expected to be chaste and submissive; as the lover of Tristan, she has to think and act boldly and assertively. What individualizes Iseut as a Wild Woman, I think, is the pleasure she takes in playing her game with the conventions.

As we have seen, women could be considered to be wild just because they were women. As Jeanne Addison Roberts, writing of a later (but not too much later) period, points out in her book about the Shakespearean Wild:

"Shakespeare's women are neither male nor female but may be understood as projections of male fantasies of the Wild female other . . . the male's foray into the mysterious female forest" (14, 18). She adds: "[T]he female is not at the center of the hero's world but in a strange, enticing, and threatening Wild territory overlapping but not identical with his own. . . . The male must venture into this territory; he may even find its terrors exciting; but he will soon return to his familiar world" (28).

Tristan makes an effort to "return to his familiar world" when the effects of the love potion (the duration of which in Béroul is three years [Fedrick 21-2]) come to an end; the lovers agree to return to Mark, and the hermit Ogrin writes to Mark for them. But Iseut, when she returns to court, does not give up her inner wildness: She sends a message to Tristan to come to her at court while Mark is away. Tristan, reinfected by Iseut's wildness, kills two of the three barons who are spying on the lovers and joins Iseut, who (according to Fedrick's annotation) exchanges love tokens with him. They swear each to be always at the service of the other (Béroul 145-8; Fedrick 148). The manuscript breaks off at this point, but we know from other versions, as summarized by Fedrick (149-50), that Tristan goes to Brittany and marries Iseut of the White Hands, though he is still in love with Queen Iseut.

Iseut, the exciting lady of the forest, can be seen as a figure of male fears and erotic fantasies given form and/or a figure of female yearnings given form. Thus it is no wonder that the tale was so popular. While Iseut was, for the male

audience, a figure of fear and fantasy, for some of the women who read and heard her tale, it seems entirely possible that she was a wish-fulfillment figure, portraying the freedom they might wish for. To view this unconventional woman and her effect on listeners/readers in more depth, we may resort to historicolegal or psychoanalytic methods. The question becomes: What has made her the way she is? We shall take the historical aspect first.

Joan Tasker Grimbert points out that in Celtic analogues to the legend, the heroine is "a kind of goddess with magical powers" who casts a spell over her mate. This spell is replaced by the potion in the Tristan-Iseut story we know, a potion that "renders both partners impotent in the face of an inexorable fate that pits their individual desires against those of the community" (xvi). I would add that the Circean quality of the female character in the Celtic legend has, in the continental legend, been lost by Iseut and transferred to her mother, who prepares the potion. The inexorability of the potion's effects in Béroul's poem is partly—but only partly—replaced by character development. Iseut in her Circean quality brings about Tristan's wildness as well as her own, "transforming" him into a leper and a wild man of the forest and causing him to be as deceptive and full of lies as she is.

It is important to remember, however, that the result of magic, provoked by Iseut, is not really magical but comes about through her deliberate use of deception. As E. Jane Burns has noted, "the potion . . . contains the seeds of the text's metaphors of deviance. . . . As victims of *fol'amor*. . . . Tristan's psycho-

physical problems (his impotence with his wife, Iseut aux Blanches Mains). It is interesting that Iseut, in contrast, seems to have no problem having intercourse with both Tristan and Mark. Iseut is only a partially successful Circe.

It is possible to take a broader, historical approach—or approaches—to the story of Iseut than I have presented here. Leslie W. Rabine reminds us that the restructuring of the feudal order in the late twelfth century assigned a subordinate place to women and established an exclusively patrilineal system; this excluded women from active roles. To ensure the legitimacy of heirs, the legal system stringently enforced the chastity of women. Romantic love, in this fragmented and transitional society, came to be seen as a means of attaining freedom. However, in Ireland, both in folklore and in history, women had more freedom than in the rest of Europe. A woman was free to divorce under certain conditions and to keep her property, while receiving compensation and a fine. Her clan, which was in Ireland more important than the family, protected her. Further, in Celtic society, boundaries between this world and the Other World were as fluid as the boundaries between matriliny and patriliny; relationships were multiple and ambiguous, preventing the formation of a rigid hierarchy and dominance (Rabine 39-43, 50-57, 73-4). Considered with this context, Iseut may be seen simply as a "wild Irish girl," which she is; she may also be seen as a woman coming from a place of relative social freedom to a place of repression.

Looking at another aspect of history, we find that Roger Pensom, in discussing the historical problem of "the beliefs and social institutions

surrounding leprosy," stresses that "[p]hysical and moral uncleanness expressed themselves in terms of each other." Lepers were socially excluded. The bow Tristan receives on entering the forest is a non-chivalric weapon; its acquisition "marks a transition away from the chivalric state." The lovers are "desocialized" as they leave the forest without bread and with torn clothes. They are also underfed; Béroul tells us that "[f]or three years they had suffered greatly, their flesh had grown pale and limp" (95). Their moral uncleanness and separation from the courtly society of Mark mimics the physical uncleanness and separation from society experienced by lepers (Pensom 40-4, 50).

Further, Pensom reminds us that Mark, when he discovers the lovers sleeping in the forest, takes his ring from Iseut's finger (which has by now become very thin) and replaces it with the gloves that she brought from Ireland, which fall onto her breast (Pensom 59; Béroul 93-4). It seems that Mark is here giving Iseut back to herself, especially if we remember that Irish women kept their own property after marriage and at divorce (Pensom 60).

Finally, we may wish to look at Iseut from a psychoanalytic standpoint, as with the other characters in this study. I do not see Iseut as a phallic woman, as I do the Wife of Bath (Chapter 5), whom she otherwise strongly resembles, especially in the Wife's cheerful defense of bigamy in her Prologue:

> But of no nombre mencion made he [God],
> Of bigamye, or of octogamye;
> Why sholde men thane speke of it vileynye? (32-4)
> Thogh maydenhede preferred bigamye. (96) (Chaucer 105, 106)

Rather, we may perhaps see her as a case of borderline personality, as evinced by her manipulation and deception of others and her "splitting" of herself (the good wife, the reckless lover) and of other people (Tristan, Governal, Husdant, and Ogrin on one side, the three barons on the other). She seems further to have the characteristic of thinking that she is always right. As Pensom says, she "avoids accepting any responsibility for their [the lovers'] situation" and is at best "ambiguously penitent." She prostrates herself to the hermit, but this is "not an attitude of religious submission but a supplication to the hermit for his good offices" (66, 67). Melanie Klein (181-9) and Susan Nolen-Hoekema (422-3) describe this splitting of other people into "all bad" and "all good" as characteristic of the borderline personality. Iseut sees herself and Tristan as "all good" and everyone else as "all bad." She also controls and manipulates Tristan and Mark (see the episode of "The Vindication of Yseut," Béroul 115-27, in which Iseut controls Mark and then Tristan). The lovers' escapades are directed by Iseut. Klein says:

> [T]he relation to another person on the basis of projecting bad parts of the self into [the other] is of a narcissistic nature, because . . . the object strongly represents one part of the self. . . . The impulse to control other people is . . . an essential element in obsessional neurosis. The need to control others can to some extent be explained by a deflected drive to control parts of the self. When these parts have been projected excessively into another person, they can only be controlled by controlling the other person. (187)

Iseut sees the good parts of herself in Tristan and projects them into him and the bad parts into everyone else. She also uses men to do the things she cannot as a woman do (kill barons, for example).

Fig. 3-2. Kali, goddess of destruction. Copper, southern India, xix century. Neumann 67.

Seen from a Jungian perspective, Iseut is a dangerous goddess of destruction like the Hindu Kali, an aspect of the Terrible Mother whom we have

seen discussed by Erich Neumann (150-3; see fig. 3-2); she brings peril and death to herself and Tristan. Iseut is not a mother and does nothing constructive; her only act of kindness in Béroul is her fondness for the dog Husdant (in contrast to the episode in Malory where she saves Sir Palomides from dying unchristened). As Carl Jung reminds us, "any helpful instinct or impulse" belongs to the positive side of the mother archetype, while the negative side "may connote anything . . . that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate" (Jung 1959:16). And Neumann adds: "[D]eath and destruction, danger and distress, hunger and nakedness, appear as helplessness in the presence of the Dark and Terrible Mother" (149). The "danger and distress, hunger and nakedness" remind us of the lovers' sojourn in the forest; the helplessness is Tristan's, and death eventually takes both of the lovers, Tristan from battle wounds and despair and Iseut from grief at Tristan's death—a tender emotion or rage at the loss of her obsessional object?

But we cannot be content with only one interpretation of Iseut, her personality, and her story. This may be one reason for the proliferation of versions of the legend. As Edith Whitehurst Williams (125) says, Iseut is one of the figures who reappear in literature throughout the centuries: "A composite Isolt, gleaned from all the surviving fragments, essays duplicity, murder, escape, repentance, endurance, and despair. But in the end she steps boldly forward to embrace her destiny of life and death." Her character, in collaboration with the various authors who have written about her, 'take[s] on a kind of autonomy'";

"[w]ith this powerful personality as a donnée, a starting point, [the poet] allows the presence to emerge." The poet must present the character "in a manner consistent with an established identity. . . . [A] self-effacing or evasive Isolt is not Isolt" (126). Like all the women we discuss here, Iseut transcends her existence as a flat being on a page; she is a powerful figure of fantasy, fear, and fulfillment, as well as a romantic figure lost in the forest of her audience's dreams.

CHAPTER 4
CHAUCER'S EMELYE

Chaucer's Emelye or Emily, the main female character of "The Knight's Tale," is often seen as a nonentity. Apparently, she does nothing but pray and weep; she has no roles but those of love object or female dependent to be disposed of. Because of this inactivity, as Laura L. Howes has commented, "[M]any readers of the tale . . . dismiss her as a two-dimensional character, one who serves the Knight's plot as the object of male desire but who does not excite sympathy or empathy from Chaucer's readers" (87). I will argue here that Emelye is in fact an interesting character. She is a beautiful figure of romance as well as an Amazon, a young woman about to take her place in the world. With her Amazonian background and love of forest sports, she can be seen as a descendant of the Innocent Wild Woman. She may grow—perhaps into a conventional wife, perhaps into a Wild and Fighting Woman, like Zenobia (Cenobie) in Chaucer's "The Monk's Tale" (Chaucer 246). The question to be considered here, however, has to do with the role played by Emelye in the Tale told by Chaucer's Knight.

To understand this character better, let us look at some of the interpretations of Emelye found in the literature. We will first discuss Paul Thurston's (18) view of the Tale as "a serious romance for the conventional reader, a satire for the more perceptive (and, it may be said, more sophisticated)

reader." We must remember that Chaucer assigned this Tale to the Knight, whose perceptions are conventional. To him, order must and can be brought about at all costs; nothing, including love—a primary cause for foolish behavior, according to Theseus ("Who may been a fool but if he love?" [1799])—can be allowed to escape from this order. Women exist for Theseus only to weep, be conquered, or function as pretty puppets, and Theseus can perhaps be seen throughout as a "stand-in" for the Knight, just as the Loathly Lady serves as a projection for the Wife of Bath (Chapter 5). The Knight's and Theseus's opinions must not be confused with Chaucer's; his treatment of these characters is indeed spiced with satire.

Elaine Tuttle Hansen (1992) takes a different view from Thurston's. In her discussion of the Tale, Hippolyta, Emelye's older sister and Theseus's wife, and Emelye herself are "described as Amazons, mythical, fighting, manlike women who have waged 'grete bataille' with Theseus." As Hansen sees Hippolyta and Emelye, both women are "erstwhile powerful separatists, rivals to the hero who first defeats them with martial violence and then domesticates them through marital union" (218). She continues,

> In any naturalistic account, the transformation of an Amazonian queen into a proper wife for the Athenian king would probably be difficult and protracted. . . . The Knight, however, both acknowledges and eclipses that presumably tempestuous taming of the wild woman. (218)

One might say that Chaucer's Knight both enjoys the wildness and feels the taming necessary—but Chaucer has other threads of narrative to develop.

Hansen goes on to remind us that Theseus is throughout the Tale associated with foreign women (Amazons, Theban widows) and that "the haunting subject of Theseus's relation to the female Other is fundamental to the . . . story." As for Emelye, it is clear that her sexuality must be contained by marriage if she is to be part of the world of order (218, 220). The gentlemanly Knight "dares not tell" how Emelye washed herself at the Temple of Diana.

Hansen feels that "there are hints that Emily is not quite as resolutely devoted to chastity as she appears to be." She is drawn out into the garden in May, traditionally "*a* time of disorder and of female sexual excess," while the garden itself has a sexual connotation, as we shall see. She hedges her prayer to remain chaste by adding, "Sende me hym that moost desireth me" (line 2325). She "agayn . . . caste a freendlich ye" (2679) on Arcite at the tournament (Hansen 221-2). Such observations can easily be overlooked, but drawn to our attention they suggest that Emelye is not a saintlike and ornamental figure of virginity, but a very human young girl.

Margaret Hallissy takes a more sociological or sociohistorical view of Emelye. She calls to our attention the fact that *"Chaucer questions what obedience to rules might mean to women"* (23; italics mine). A father, in both Theseus's and the Knight's day, was responsible for protecting his daughter and presenting her intact to her husband. As Hallissy explains,

> Of crucial importance . . . is the smooth transition of a virgin from father to husband. The young girl in the space between father and husband is in that most threatening of situations, a borderline

> state. . . . Disruption of any element of the transitional process . . . constitutes the plot—the only possible plot—of a virgin's story. (44)

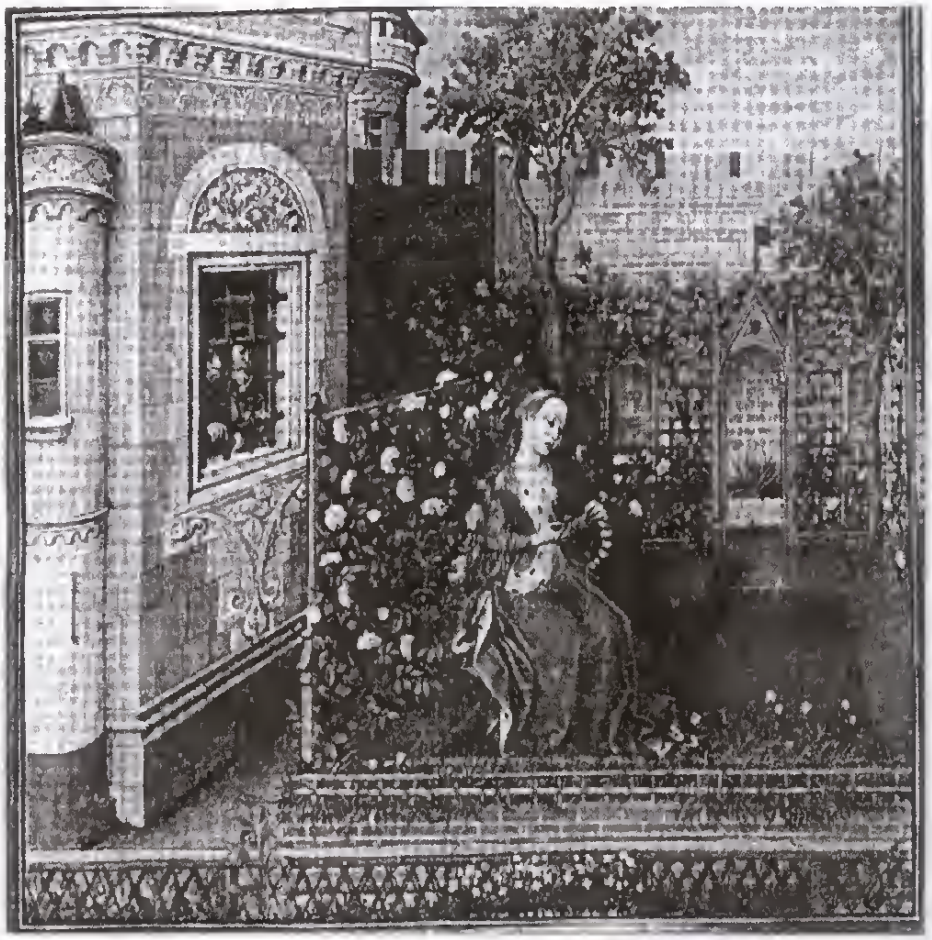

Fig. 4-1. Illustration from a manuscript of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, ca. 1455, French. Vienna, Natl. Lib. MS 2617, fol. 53. Reprinted by permission of Bildarchiv de Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. From Howes.

And Hallissy adds, with reference to Emelye's love of the forest: "Wilderness is always threatening in medieval literature, even to men; the unenclosed forest, then, represents a breach in the web of protection that should surround a woman" (48). She points out that medieval gardens consisted of a larger,

semipublic (though walled) space, often containing a smaller (also walled) garden called the *hortus conclusus*, which provided more privacy (fig. 4-1).

The walled garden provides further possibilities for interpretation of Chaucer's Emelye, as Hallissy demonstrates:

> [A]rchitectural metaphors in medieval literature often refer to the biological structure of the female body. Women not only *exist* in architectural space, they *are* architectural space; their bodies enclose inner space, and women are themselves enclosed for protection of that inner space. (94-5)

It is probably the *hortus conclusus*, the more private and sexual space, in which Emelye walks in lines 1846-55 of "The Knight's Tale." At this point she has just risen from bed and dressed herself. We see as she walks in the place laid out for her that just as she is transformed from a classical wild Amazon to a fourteenth-century English maiden, so her space is transformed from a wilderness to a medieval garden. The only forest that remains to her is that which courtly society uses for hunting, and she is part of that society, subject to the authority of her male protector, Theseus.

Three views of Emelye have just been presented. To me, only the latter two—Hansen's of Emelye as Amazon, and Hallissy's of Emelye as lady of the garden and of both her garden and inner space—have merit.

Chaucer's view is not that of Thurston, of Theseus or the Knight. He sees women as people, not as puppets; he is, as Hallissy suggests, questioning what

the obedience women owed to male authority might mean to them. The question now becomes: How can we understand Emelye as a person in her context?

A valuable insight has been provided by Linda Schierse Leonard, who does not discuss Chaucer at all. Leonard is a Jungian analyst whose book, *The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father-Daughter Relationship*, centers on the ways in which women can be wounded by father figures and by a patriarchal society. She states:

> Whenever there is a patriarchal authoritarian attitude which devalues the feminine by reducing it to a number of roles or qualities which come, not from woman's own experience, but from an abstract view of her—there one finds the collective father overpowering the daughter, not allowing her to grow creatively from her own essence. (10)

This "abstract view" sounds like the view Theseus has of Emelye. According to Leonard, authoritarian men often deny their own feminine sides and tend to focus on what they consider masculine: "obedience, duty and rationality." "Because their emphasis is on control and doing things right, frequently they are not open to the unexpected, to the expression of creativity and feelings . . . they tend to treat such things with sarcasm and derision" (11-13). This is a good description of Theseus at his worst, as when he, declaring love to be nothing but foolishness, describes Emelye as a mere animal: "She woot namore of all this hoote fare, / By God, than woot a cokkow or a hare!" (lines 1809-10; hares are notoriously sexual animals). She is not even an animal but an instrument, nothing but the cause of foolishness, in his following lines: "But all moot ben

assayed, hoot and coold; / A man moot ben a fool, or young or oold . . ." (1811-12).

Leonard continues, setting forth the Jungian concept of the *puella aeterna* or eternal girl. This is one of the patterns resulting from a wounded relation of a girl to her father. Another is the "armored Amazon." The eternal girl is forever a dependent daughter. "[S]he gives over to others her own strength as well as the responsibility for shaping her identity." The "armored Amazon" pattern, on the other hand, develops "as a reaction against inadequate fathering, occurring either on the personal or cultural level" (16, 17). The woman must do what her father did not do. (For the Amazon of legend, of course, the task of self-determination is facilitated by the fact that she had no father figure at all.) Such a woman takes on a masculine identity, becoming alienated from her own creativity and spontaneity.

These patterns are both possible, and surprising as it may seem, both patterns can exist in the same woman (17, 18). In the puella's "darling doll" pattern, woman adapts to men's fantasies of the feminine. In contrast, the Amazon "warrior queen" "is in touch with her anger and assertion" but "forgets her feminine feeling and softness." "If the warrior queen can rest in her feminine center and be assertive when appropriate, she can show the way to develop feminine strength and power" (39, 143). As Leonard further states, Jung thought one must see the value of both sides of the personality—feminine and masculine —and try to integrate them (21). The puella must recognize and accept her inner

strength and consciously make her choices (57-8). Is this what Emelye must learn to do? How much opportunity for conscious choice will she have?

In my own view, Emelye is a confused young girl in a state of transition from one society to another and from girlhood to womanhood. (She is, of course, considered a woman by her society, since she is old enough to be married.) She must give up the Amazonian self of her earlier life, submit to Theseus's authority, and become a soft, yielding woman and wife, the ideal of the courtly world. What can she do? How can she free herself?

The strength of the Amazonic woman, according to Leonard, needs "to come out naturally from the center of her personality rather than be forced out from an ego adaptation. What is needed is to bring that strength to the area of which she is afraid" (81). Emelye is not quite ready to do this yet; she wishes to avoid the conflict without and within her. As she prepares to pray to Diana, she decides that the best way to escape from her dilemma would be to remain chaste forever, and to become a priestess.

In praying to Diana, Emelye is at the brink of a dangerous realm: Diana is not only "chaste goddesse of the wodes grene / To whom bothe hevene and erthe and see is sene" (lines 2297-8) but also "Queene of the regne of Pluto derk and lowe" whose "vengeaunce and ire" are to be feared (2299, 2302). Emelye feels her existence as an autonomous being is at stake; the only way to preserve her self is to be chaste all her life, to hunt (both an Amazonian and a courtly pursuit) and walk in the woods (Amazonian; a protected young girl would

not do this) and also (she adds) to serve Diana, presumably as a priestess. But, it is noted, she stipulates that if her destiny is such that she must marry one of the two men who love her, she hopes Diana will "sende . . . hym that moost desireth me" (2325). She keeps her options open and defines what is desirable to her—not to be received as a trophy.

While she is praying, the fires on the altar begin to behave strangely. One goes out and rekindles, while the other burns out, and from the "brondes [brands'] ende" bloody drops run out (lines 2339-40). This of course prefigures the end of the story, though the reader and Emelye do not know what that end is yet. Nevertheless, Emelye is "soore agast" (2341) and begins to weep.

More can be said about these fires. As Howes has pointed out in her fine study *Chaucer's Gardens and the Language of Convention*, the quenched torches of Emelye's fires, with their drops of blood, are "a graphic image of lost maidenhead following several puns on the female genitalia with the word 'queynt(e).'" "Queynt(e)" can mean "curious" or "strange" or, as a verb, "quench" besides its meaning of "female genitals" (Howes 93; see Davis et al., 115 [two entries]).

At this point, Diana, dressed as a huntress, appears and answers Emelye's prayer by telling her that she will marry one of the two men, although Diana may not tell her which one; Emelye will have her "aventure of love" (line 2355). Her desire to remain chaste must be "quenched," as Diana explains, by reason of "eterne word writen and confirmed" (2350; Howes 93). The word

"aventure" reminds us of a knight's quest and may suggest to Emelye that perhaps love and marriage might not be so bad. At any rate, Emelye accepts the answer, though in bewilderment: "What amounteth this, allas? / I putte me in thy protecciouη, / Dyane, and in thy disposicioun" (2362-4). Note that word "disposicioun": it may mean "disposal" (a sense cited by Davis et al., [39], although they do not cite this passage). If we accept this meaning, we realize that Diana, a female deity and role model, rather than Theseus, now has the authority to dispose of Emelye's future—at least in Emelye's mind. Diana, of course, is not the ultimate decider: as we have seen, Emelye must marry by reason of "eterne word writen and confirmed." Her fate will be determined by the gods, as in myth and classical epic. (We thus have three authorities: Chaucer [who writes the tale told by his character, the Knight], the gods, and Theseus). At any rate, Emelye goes home, apparently both resigned and comforted—perhaps even a little excited.

Let us stop for a moment and look at what is going on. What is Chaucer doing here? It seems even a little possible that he is both dramatizing the quasihistorical transition from matriarchy to patriarchy and the inner conflict in women between singleness and commitment, individualism and bondedness, as some may see the opposing ways of life traditionally called "feminine" and "masculine." Women must reconcile these attitudes within themselves and in their daily lives. Emelye has accepted the necessity, in her situation, of marriage, but we are not yet sure how far the wench is quenched, how far the

Amazon is tamed. Susan Crane (1990:49) states that "adventure's validity inheres in that strangeness or alienness which provides occasions for expanding and transforming the heroic self." Can Emelye look forward to this?

Before Emelye's prayer, Palamon prays to Venus, detailing his sufferings and asking Venus for mercy ("'Mercy, lady bright, that knowest weele / My thought and seest what harmes that I feele!'") and for possession of his lady. He does not ask for victory, renown, or praise, only to have Emelye in his arms. If his prayer is granted, he will worship forever at Venus's temple, offer sacrifice and burn fires ("'Thy temple wol I worshipe everemo, / And on thyn auter . . . I wold oon sacrifice and fires beete [kindle]'"). Note the connection between these fires and those of Emelye; his fires will never be quenched. He addresses Venus as he would Emelye ("'my lady sweete'"). The emphasis is on his undying love for Emelye, devotion to Venus, and eternal gratitude for her help; the fires, besides showing his love and devotion to goddess and lady, also refer to the end of the story, which he does not yet know. If Venus does not wish his love to be fulfilled, he continues, he hopes to be killed by Arcite, and he hopes that Arcite will be happy in his love. We see a devoted lover, a devout worshiper, and a grateful heart. Palamon subjects himself to the goddess's will, not demanding what he wants but asking meekly. The statue shakes, confirming that his prayer has been granted (lines 2221-65).

Arcite, on the other hand, prays to Mars for victory. He asks to be "oon of thyne" and recalls to the god the occasion when he "[used] the beautee / Of

faire, yonge, fresshe Venus free," betraying her husband, Vulcan. Victory is the theme of Arcite's prayer; he refers only briefly to his love for Emelye, and concludes, "Yif me [victorie]; I aske thee namoore" (lines 2373-2420). His only descriptive phrase concerning Emelye is of her indifference to him ("'For she that dooth me at this wo endure / Me reccheth nevere wher I synke or fleete'"; he is interested only in recognition. His prayer, which occupies lines 2373 to 2420, has no sooner concluded than strife among the gods begins, and the outcome is decided, even before the battle, by Saturn.

We note not only that Palamon is more interested in love and Arcite in war, but also that Arcite is not really interested in Emelye as a person; she is simply a trophy to him. He employs the word "used" for Mars's conquest of Venus; Emelye is to be used, not to be truly known. John P. McCall has remarked that Palamon and Arcite "fall in love in different ways" (73), and that Palamon sees Emelye as a Venus character (lines 1101-7), while Arcite describes her in "the deadly, impetuous language of Mars." "For Arcite the love of Emelye is, and will prove to be, less a matter of affection than a contest," as McCall (74) says. It is interesting that the two suitors reflect the two sides of Emelye's character: warlikeness and committed love.

The tenderhearted reader naturally favors Palamon's suit, as does the divine arbiter Saturn—and we learn that Palamon will marry Emelye, although none of the mortal characters knows this yet. Emelye's prayer will thus be answered: She will marry the man that "moost desireth" her. Saturn takes

Venus's side, not Mars's, and resolves the strife, saying to the gods, "Bitwixe yow ther moot be som tyme pees, / Al be ye noght of o compleccioun [one temperament], / That causeth al day swich divisioun" (2474-6). Saturn is interested in bringing about peace and denies Arcite's and Mars's warlike hopes. The reader may be comforted, but there is still one question: How will this come about?

Fig. 4-2. Judicial trial. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. <http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/lifemann/tournmnt/duels.html>.

The day of the tournament, Theseus forbids any weapons but the longsword and mace; "[h]e wilneth no destruccion of blood!" (2364). As we saw in the episode of his kindness to the Theban widows who sought permission to bury their husbands at the beginning of the Tale, Theseus is capable of human

pity. His heart has now been moved by concern for human life. And we are now ready for the encounter of the heroes (fig. 4-2).

Emelye and her sister ride after Theseus and the two Thebans to the lists. Arcite wounds Palamon and is declared the winner, and Theseus announces that Arcite will marry Emelye. As Arcite rides victorious "endelong the large place" (2678) Emelye casts "a freendlich ye" upon him, finding him not unattractive. Chaucer may seem to degrade her here: "(For wommen, as to speken in commune, / Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune)" (2680-2). However, Emelye's excitement here reminds us of many a teenage girl's reaction to the sight of a hero. Palamon is a loser, Arcite a winner; Emelye may not as yet see beyond this.[1]

But Saturn has promised Venus satisfaction. With Pluto, he now sends a "furie infernal" (2685) causing Arcite's horse to leap and stumble. Arcite is gravely wounded ("he pighte hym [struck himself] on the pomel of his heed, / That in the place he lay as he were deed" [2689-90]) and is brought to Theseus's palace. People declare that "soothly ther was no disconfiture. / For fallyng nys nat but an aventure. . . ." (2721-2). We find in Norman Davis's and colleagues' *A Chaucer Glossary* that "aventure" may mean "chance," "fortune, lot," "risk, peril," "misfortune, accident," or "event" (Davis et al., 10). Susan Crane

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[1]Susan Crane reminds us that "[t]he couplet does not appear in several manuscripts, including Hengwrt, Ellesmere, and Cambridge Gg 4.27; if it is Chaucer's, it seems to come to us *sous rature*, or it might represent an early copyist's attempt to make sense of Emelye" (1990:53).

(1990:48) adds that "'[a]dventure' evokes both the Boethian hierarchy of apparent causes, as a near synonym for 'sort' and 'fortune,' and the generic field of romance, as the term of choice for encounters with the unknown." "Aventure" in the second sense is used for the adventures of knights in the French romances of Chrétien de Troyes. However, a range of possibilities emerge from this one word; the various definitions of Davis all seem valid.

"Aventure" in the earlier passage where Diana answers Emelye's prayer may mean either "fortune, lot" or "event." It may mean that Emelye will certainly have her "aventure of love" (event, quest) or that it is her "fortune, lot" to have it. Are the young people to be seen as the puppets of Fate? Chaucer is using the epic convention that the gods bring events about, but there is also the feeling that the young men (and Emelye too) get what they have prayed for. Arcite prays for victory and asks for "namoore" (2420); Palamon asks for Emelye's hand (2242-3); Emelye prays to marry the man that "moost desireth" her. We remember the saying, "Be careful what you pray for; you may get it." The three have chosen to pray as they have; hence they are not mere puppets of Fate. Crane, again, states that "[a]t the culmination as throughout, adventure's validity inheres in that strangeness or alienness which provides occasions for expanding and transforming the heroic self" (1990:49). This is the possibility that awaits the young people.

Arcite dies of his wound, and as he dies he forgets his ardent desire for victory, takes tender farewell of Emelye, and forgives Palamon. Emelye shrieks

and weeps, as does everyone else. At Arcite's lavish funeral, she faints, but Chaucer does not or will not tell what she speaks or feels (2944). Her behavior here is conventionally feminine, hardly that of a Wild Woman who attempts to determine her own destiny, but it allows Chaucer to get her off the stage while male discussion can take place. It is left for Theseus, with his "bisy cure" or care (2853), to decide what shall be done next.

In spite of Theseus's busyness, it takes "certeyn yeres" for everyone's grief to be "stynted" (2968).[2] Theseus now calls a "parlement" at which, among other matters, he plans to discuss—for the last time—the subject of what is to be done with Emelye.[3] It is at this point that he delivers his famous "cheyne of love" speech, a solemn and overlong oration reminding this reader, at least, of Shakespeare's Polonius:

> The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
> When he first made the faire cheyne of love,
> Greet was th'effect, and heigh was his entente.
> Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente,
> For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
> The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
> In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee. (2987-92)

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[2]The question of Emelye's age is puzzling. If she is about 12 when Arcite and Palamon see her in the garden (the "limit below which both secular custom and canon law forbade girls to be married" [Duby 141]), the two knights suffer for her love for seven years, and "certeyn yeres" have passed after that, Emelye would be over 20 when she marries—which seems an unrealistically late age of first marriage for a medieval woman. Perhaps Chaucer nodded here, or perhaps Emelye's age was simply not important to him.

[3]Here we see Emelye the Amazon forced into the role of puppet by Theseus, as male power triumphs.

And so on; this exposition lasts until line 3066. Paul Beekman Taylor's comments on this speech are interesting:

> It is curious that Theseus should argue an order of the universe as a bond of love after having destroyed its natural order. . . . [H]e seizes upon the occasion to strengthen his political power by giving Emily to Palamon. . . . A new beginning out of the chaos of sorrow is a fine prospect, but the transformation of social and natural cycles of order and disorder into a perfect and eternal joy is well beyond Theseus's ordaining powers. (86, 87)

The young people are moved like pieces on a chessboard. Neither the woman or, as often in reality, the man has much say in the matter. Here I begin to suspect that Chaucer is struggling with and questioning the restrictions of his own society. When Theseus counsels that he himself, Palamon, Emelye, and everyone else "make of sorwes two / O parfit joye, lastynge everemo" (3071-2), he is simply directing Emelye to accept Palamon in marriage:

> "'Suster,'" quod he, "this is my fulle assent,
> With al th'avys heere of my parlement,
> That gentil Palamon, youre owene knyght,
> That serveth yow with wille, herte, and myght,
> And ever hath doon syn ye first hm knewe,
> That ye shul of youre grace upon hym rewe,
> And taken hm for housbonde and for lord. . . .'" (3075-81)

Palamon and Emelye are not married, however, until lines 3094-8.

Theseus justifies himself in deciding everyone's fate by citing the "cheyne of love," the order of the universe. As Taylor notes (20), Chaucer got this concept from Plato's *Timaeus* in Latin translation. God's (whether Jupiter's or the Christian God's, or both) authority and divine will can be seen also as Chaucer's justification in marrying Palamon and Emelye. It does seem to me, though, that

Chaucer may again be poking fun at Theseus's obsession with order, as well as placating the Knight-like reader.

So the tale ends. The ending is conventional, in spite of Chaucer's questioning of conventions. We too may question what is happening: is Emelye a happily tamed Wild Woman, or is she merely a tamed woman? Is the order imposed by Chaucer, Jupiter, God, and Theseus a stifling and irksome one? Are we to be disappointed in Chaucer?

It may be argued that Chaucer could do nothing else; a woman of his time had only two choices, marriage or the service of God. It might also be argued that if Emelye still wanted to be a priestess (nun in Chaucer's society) she would have done so by the time "certeyn yeres" had passed.

It could, of course, be argued that Chaucer is simply following Boccaccio. But Chaucer, as we know, was not a mere follower, though he changed plots elsewhere, as in the *Legend*(s) *of Good Women*. The point I am making is that the conventionality of the ending does not succeed in removing the questions and the ambiguity—nor, I believe, is it meant to. It may seem to some that in the final ending, where we are told that Emelye and Palamon live "happily ever after" (3101-6), the characters pass into the realm of fairy tale, where natural human problems are abolished. Perhaps so, but we are still left wondering if the conventions really make everybody happy, and if Chaucer thinks they do. Taylor (15) explains that "Chaucer's poetry exposes the visible disorder of man's experience out of which he would find order." *Find* it, not *impose* it. Venus has

apparently conquered Mars, but what is the everyday outcome in the years ahead? Will Emelye, like Zenobia of "The Monk's Tale," become a mighty warrior queen in her own right (Chaucer 246)? We may hope so, but we cannot assume that it is likely. The story of Emelye ends with what, reading from the perspective established here, can be considered a triumph of masculine power, consolidated by reference to the controlling force of classical tradition.

CHAPTER 5
THE WIFE OF BATH

The Wife of Bath is almost too easy to write about. As a woman who enjoys sex and is uninhibited about saying so, she seems the epitome of the Wild Woman as envisaged by the Middle Ages—that is, a hypersexual woman. Not only is she hypersexual (by the standards of her age, at least), she also defies the conventions laid down for women by being aggressive, assertive, and bold in her search for the life she wants. I argue in this chapter that she has characteristics of all the types of Wild Woman, and also that she is *not* a caricature or a stereotype, but a fully rounded female character.

First, however, it seems appropriate to provide a context; an overview of the conventional wisdom about woman in the Middle Ages may be of use here. This view of woman was inherited from Greco-Roman society, where women were seen as "cold" (since they did not produce the heat and masculine virtues depending on semen)[1] and yet "profoundly sexual, insatiable in their capacity to experience intercourse and to enjoy it," as Joyce E. Salisbury (84) states; see also Vern L. Bullough (226). Inheriting the Greco-Roman view, medieval Christian thinkers held that women's and men's sexual expression was

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[1]It is interesting that we now see actively sexual women as "hot" and less responsive women as "cold" ("frigid").

"profoundly different" (Salisbury 85). Men were strong and active; their "power" was moral and spiritual, not just physical; and, since semen was believed to come from the brain, masculinity was linked to reason and men were the rational half of humanity. Isidore of Seville explained all this by means of etymology: A man is called *vir* because he has greater force, *vis*, than woman, while woman, *mulier*, derived her name from *molites*, softness (Bullough 226). Women, on the other hand, "embodied sexuality"; their sexuality was "open and receptive." Indeed, women were open in every way—open-mouthed and talkative, as well as lustful (Salisbury 85-7). Augustine did feel that men and women "shared a common sexual experience," but the prevailing view was still Greco-Roman (88). It need hardly be added that a belief in the profound difference of men's and women's experience must lead to psychological alienation of the sexes from each other and to the feeling on the part of male writers that woman was alien and to be feared. In this connection, the reader may look again at the work of Wolfgang Lederer.

In early Christianity, as we see in Peter Brown's *The Body and Society*, sexual discipline was the way of giving the Christian Church a distinctive code, "the equivalent of the Jewish Law" (60), to separate Christians from pagans and Jews; the ban on divorce and disapproval of the remarriage of widowed persons strengthened this. Sexual abstinence came to be seen as one "mark of exceptional closeness to the spirit of God"; indeed, a dazzling reputation for sexual abstinence could make a woman or an uneducated man the equal of

anyone! Christians, as well as Jews and pagans, believed that abstinence and especially virginity "made the human body a more appropriate vehicle to receive divine inspiration." Possession, the "flooding of the body with an alien, divine spirit," excluded "the warm rush of vital spirits" associated with sex. Indeed, sexual desire was seen as the first manifestation of Adam and Eve's loss of immortality and fall from grace (60-61, 66, 67, 86).

In the Middle Ages, stripping a woman of sexuality made her—not equal to man, for she could not be a priest, but almost like a man. Katharina Wilson and Elizabeth Makowski express this as follows in *Wykked Wives and the Woes of Marriage*:

> [T]he chaste ideal denied the necessity of the traditional sex roles and thus continued the revolutionary New Testament emphasis on the baptismal equality of all. . . . Although woman was less perfect and more libidinous than man and her reason for existence more closely tied to procreation, the patristic view was that she could rise above her subordination by becoming like a man, that is, by denying her sexuality. (59)

Indeed, a chaste maiden might be so far ennobled as to pass for a man. Consider the story of St. Marina (discussed by Eric G. Stanley, 59). This saint dressed as a boy in order to enter her father's monastery, was accepted as such (to the extent of being accused of paternity), and was only found to be a woman when she died. St. Eugenia, in Ælfric's homily, dressed as a man and at her death claimed to be ending the course of her life *werlice* (like a man) (60-61). As Stanley remarks, "[t]he virgin martyrs are the heroines of medieval England"; they are "seen as the exception which proves the rule that women, being

weaker, have a greater proclivity to sinfulness than men" (66, 67). We may pause briefly to note the contradiction in Greco-Roman and medieval Christian thinking: women are feared, aggressive, and rampantly sexual, but at the same time they are weak, "cold," and cannot help being sinful.

From the chaste virgin we pass to the married woman or widow. A woman was often married very young; seven, most canonists agreed, was an appropriate age for a girl to become engaged, twelve for marriage. The Church accepted the idea that parents should determine when and whom children married. As Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq asks, "Did a girl affianced at seven and slated to marry at twelve know what she was doing? Did she have any options?" Saint Ode refused to give her consent on her wedding day; she returned home and, to prevent any further attempt to force her into marriage, cut off her nose. "How many women were willing to pay such a price for freedom?" (217).

Once married, the young woman had to accept the doctrine that she was naturally inferior and hence received less "friendship" from her husband than he did from her. As Silvana Vecchio states, "[T]he obligation to love her husband, essential to her wifely function, turned out to be inexhaustible, the very mark of her inferiority" (111). Vecchio adds:

> Since a woman was dominated by senses and incapable of attaining the self-control expected of the male sex, she was condemned to an all-consuming but mistaken love in the attempt to achieve the unachievable: the limited but perfect love her husband gave in return. . . . [S]he had to find external criteria to give meaning to her all-consuming love for her husband. The criteria

> and meaning were to be found in the husband's whims, to which the wife . . . [must] bow to voluntary submission. (111, 112)

This is assuming, of course, that the wife loved her husband. Even if she did not, obedience, submission, and fidelity were expected. Is it any wonder that sometimes women rebelled and became adulterous? But a woman who did this became an unchaste, badly behaved, indeed wicked, woman. A good woman obeyed. A bad, uncontrolled, or "wild" woman refused to submit.

For a man, marriage had a different meaning. Marriage was seen as a bar to men's professional advancement and "adultery against the first bride, philosophy." Love, marriage, and reproduction were thought by some to trap more souls in the "prison of matter," though this was a Gnostic, heretical view (Wilson and Makowski 43, 93). Also, as we have seen, it was felt that abstinence and virginity made it easier for both men and women to draw closer to God. If marriage was to be discouraged, then, it made sense for men to denigrate and even demonize women. An antimarriage literature arose, featuring such authors as Tertullian and St. Jerome. To Tertullian, wicked women were loquacious, slothful, gossipy, lustful, gluttonous, and fornicating. St. Jerome stated that women were either odious or excessively passionate (which was probably odious to him also). Wilson and Makowski point out that Jerome had no first-hand knowledge of wicked wives; his examples are "biblical, historical, mythological, or admittedly based on secondhand information" (39-40, 49, 57).

There was a hiatus in antimarriage literature for several centuries after Jerome, as Germanic customs prevailed over classical models in society. In these customs the bride was given gifts, rather than expected to give a dowry, so possibly the notion of woman as commodity lessened. However, as population increased and resources became scarcer, the goal seems to have been to limit the acquisition of resources and power by women—which then, of course, provided additional reason to denigrate them. The reemergence of dualist religious sects—"antisocial, antimarriage, and antiprocreation," as Wilson and Makowski put it (65)—led to renewed antimarriage and antiwoman writings. The authors quote Walter Map (English, 12th century), who wrote of woman in his *Valerius*: "The three-formed monster is adorned with the face of a noble lion, polluted with the body of a stinking goat, armed with the tail of a rank viper" (65, 89). And Shulamith Shahar, quoting from a declaration of a double monastery that decided to abolish its female section, shows the extremity of the view that led to their action: "Since nothing is the less harmful to men than their proximity, we hereby declare that for the good of our souls, our bodies and our worldly goods we will no longer accept sisters into our order and we will avoid them as we do mad dogs" (36).

The monks who wrote such things also gave woman, by implication, great power; for any being more dangerous than a tiger, a viper, or a mad dog is powerful indeed. This reflects fear of women (Lederer 1968), and, as seems obvious, a defense on the part of clerics—who, from the 11th century on, as

Jacques Dalarun (16) points out, were expected to remain celibate—against their own sexual nature.

Patriarchal defense against the fear of women and attempts to preserve male supremacy and authority were maintained in Chaucer's day by actions as well as literature (and modern scholarship finds that much misogynistic matter has been added to Chaucerian texts by others). The concept of a wife as a subordinate who had to accept authority led to the belief that a husband was justified in wife beating, as Margaret Hallissy, Cynthia Ho, and Shulamith Shahar show. If a superior beat a subordinate, this was "not only permissible but necessary; God Himself is punishing the world for its sinfulness" (Hallissy 86). Gratian's *Decretum*, a law book of the beginning of the fourteenth century, sets down the rule that a man might chastise and beat his wife, "for she is of his household, therefore the lord may chastise his own." He added, ". . . so likewise the husband is bound to chastise his wife in moderation . . . unless he be a clerk, in which case he may chastise her more severely" (Hallissy 86, Ho 19). We know that the Wife of Bath's fifth husband, Jankyn the clerk, took this to heart. Husbands could, however, be tried and fined if they went too far. In some places, also, men were punished for being beaten by their wives: "The husband was seated facing backwards on a donkey, his hands clutching its tail, a humiliating punishment also inflicted on prostitutes and fornicators" (Shahar 89-90).

Jankyn takes pleasure in reading to the Wife a book called "Valerie and Theofraste" (Valerius, i.e., Walter Map, *Dissuasio Valerii Rufino ne ducat uxorem* [Dissuasion of Valerius to Rufinus that he not take a wife], 1180-90). In this work, which takes the form of a letter, Valerius tries to dissuade Rufinus from marrying, citing both biblical and mythological examples of the bad effects of loving women. The "Theofraste" of Jankyn's book is Theophrastus, author of the *Golden Book on Marriage*, another book attacking marriage. Theophrastus's book included that of St. Jerome (340?-420), *Against Jovinianus*, Jovinianus being "an unorthodox monk who denied that virginity was necessarily superior to marriage." This text had much to say about the defects of wives, some of it entertaining: "[S]he complains that one lady goes out better dressed than she; that another is looked up to by all; 'I am a poor despised nobody at the ladies[']assemblies.' 'Why did you ogle that creature next door?' 'Why were you talking to the maid?' . . . 'I am not allowed to have a single friend, or companion'" (Jerome 1893).

Chaucer develops the Wife of Bath's character by taking off from this kind of antimarriage literature; in the "book of wykked wives" read aloud by Jankyn, this kind of admonition of the husband, as well as many other tales of women's defects and misbehavior, provided a well-rounded stereotype. He adds such details as the Wife's horoscope, her clothing, and, finally, her behavior in the altercation with her fifth husband, which left her partially deaf. With respect to her horoscope, the Wife declares:

> For certes, I am al Venerien
> In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
> Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
> And Mars me yaf my sturdy hardynesse;
> Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
> Allas! Allas! that evere love was synne!
> I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
> By vertu of my constellacioun. . . .
> (Wife's Prologue, 609-16; Chaucer 113)

The Wife seems to be saying that she is naturally wild, lecherous, and "hardy" (bold); she cannot help it; she uses astrology not only to explain but to excuse herself. Another interpretive perspective, however, is possible. Chauncy Wood, in his book on Chaucer's use of astrology, points out that if she follows Nicole Oresme's *Livre de divinacions* ("Book of Divinations"; Oresme was a contemporary of Chaucer), the Wife, while she might be inclined to lechery by her stars, has free will to control her behavior. Chaucer's beliefs may have been similar. He states in his *Astrolabe* that horoscopes "ben observaunces of judicial matere and rytes of payens, in which my spirit hath no feith," and describes the practices of astrologers as follows: "[T]hey wol caste that thei [the customers] have a fortunat planete in hir ascendent, and yit in his felicite; and than say thei that it is wel" (Wood 11, 15; Chaucer 670-1). Astrologers tell their customers what they want to hear, but it is possible to take a critical stance with regard to what the astrologers say. The Wife, therefore, cannot blame her stars for what

she is; she has free will and, as she herself claims, she does as she wishes (fig. 5-1).[2]

Fig. 5-1. Influence of the Zodiac on the Body (Pol de Limbourg). From Wood.

Is she Martian, Venusian, or both? Some, like F.N. Robinson, have argued that she is "none too feminine" (697), pointing to the "strident" or Martian part of her character. Edwin J. Howard (139-40), however, argues against this: "It would be difficult to find a more completely feminine character in the pages of

[2]Is free will actually what the Wife's Prologue and Tale are about? How is it related to "sovereignitee" or the right to assert one's will and have what one wants?

literature. . . . [S]he confesses to a great desire to be loved—it runs through all her *Prologue* and is the point of her *Tale*." The two twentieth-century Chaucerians clearly have different views of what it means to be "feminine." I incline to Howard's position, but agree that the Wife has a strident, Martian quality (perhaps a defense mechanism against being hurt, or a way of barreling through all obstacles to get what she wants?). Martian-Venusian vacillation is shown in her clothing, to which we now turn.

The Wife does not present herself as a sweet, submissive woman. She clearly presents herself as a woman who intends to be noticed. She is dressed, according to the "General Prologue" description, in a wimple, a big hat, a "foot-mantel" (this "foot-mantel" was a baglike contraption into which a woman's skirts were fitted; women did not ride sidesaddle until at least the 1380s, but rode astride with their skirts stuffed into the foot-mantel [Brooke 60]; this is shown in fig. 5-2), stockings of "fyn scarlet reed," shoes "ful moyste and newe" and sharp spurs (Chaucer, General Prologue 435-7, 470-3). This illustration from the Ellesmere manuscript (which, of course, Chaucer may not have seen) shows her in a bright red jacket, a blue foot-mantel, and the sharp spurs, with a whip in her hand. The Wife is arrayed, not in armor, but in the trappings of the phallic woman in her red stockings and big hat. The hat is "[a]s brood as is a bokeler or a targe" (471; a "bokeler" was a buckler or small shield, a "targe" a shield [Davis et al., 17, 150]). This presents the Wife in a warlike, Mars-like aspect, made even more fearsome by the sharp spurs.

Fig. 5-2. The Wife of Bath. From the Ellesmere manuscript. <http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer>.

If the chronology of actual time could be collapsed, one might almost believe that Chaucer had read Bertram D. Lewin's 1933 paper "The Body as Phallus" (26-9, 34-5). Lewin, a Freudian psychoanalyst, describes a patient who fantasized that her whole body was a penis and who compared her "outpour of words" to an orgasm. He states: "[T]he fantasy of one's whole body being a penis is symbolically a passive feminine fantasy, the equivalent of the phallic level fantasy of castration." However, it can be observed that, while the Wife's costume may seem masculine, it is also feminine. Laura F. Hodges (366) notes

that a small shield was used metaphorically to describe the *mons veneris*, while the targe had a *bouche* cut into it so that a lance could pass through. The costume, therefore, represents both the male and female genitals; the Wife is armored in her male and female clothing, just as Grendel's mother is armored in her armor. Another reader, Priscilla Martin, comments that the Wife "has evidently taken a lot of trouble and spent a lot of money on her outfit . . . but the general effect is more strident than seductive" (38).

Moving from the Mars-Venus, male-female portrait of the Wife in the General Prologue to a scene, or supposed scene, in the Wife's Personal Prologue, we see this startling picture of her invented dream, which she recounts to Jankyn before her marriage:

> And eek I seyde I mette [dreamed] of hym all nyght.
> He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
> And al my bed was ful of verray blood;
> "But yet I hope that ye shall do me good,
> For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught."
> And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught. (576-82)

The blood/gold motif, for Jankyn's delectation and meant as an incitement for him to marry the Wife, suggests war and pillage. If these lines are authentic—and Peter G. Beidler (64, notes to lines 575-84) says that "[t]he dominant view is that the lines are Chaucer's own"—they may show the Wife as *both* strident *and* seductive. Let us consider this in the context of her relationships with men.

Married for the first time at the age of twelve ("Wife's Prologue" 4), the Wife of Bath had three old husbands whom—since she had no other option in

the society of her day—she learned to manage. Not caring for the life of a chaste widow, she had only one choice when a husband died—to marry again in the hope that things would be better this time. Disappointed that her husbands were not the romantic lovers she craved (and we can see, from her later relationship with Jankyn, that she craved romantic love all along), she retaliated against them and the system. The property she inherited from one husband made her a better match for the next and gave her power—the power to do what she wanted, since after all she brought something to the marriage. This kind of marriage is a game in which love is absent. The Wife of Bath feels she owes her husbands nothing once she has acquired their property:

> They had me yiven hir lond and hir tresor.
> Me neded not do longer diligence
> To winne hir love or doon hem reverence. (lines 204-6)

But at the same time she does try to please them, as well as herself, socially (her phrase is "for her profit and ease"), knowing that happy husbands will be more indulgent and she will be able to live more comfortably with them. She does use them to get what she wants:

> I governed hem so well, after my lawe,
> That ech of hem ful blissful was and fawe [eager]
> To bringe me gay thinges fro the faire. (219-21)

She manipulates her old husbands by complaining in the manner of the bad wives in *Against Jovinianus*, discussed above: "Why is my neighebores wyf so gay? I sitte at hoom; I have no thrifty clooth. . . . What rowne ye with oure

mayde?" (236-8, 241) and so on, by going on strike sexually (408-10), and, after she has tormented them sufficiently, by "taming" them in the manner of Circe.

Fig. 5-3. Husband-dominator in engraving by Martin Treu, ca. 1540-43. From Yarnall.

The only source the Middle Ages had for the story of Circe was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which the animals (even the lions, bears, and wolves) enchanted by Circe are "gentle and they wagged their tails / And fawned on us and followed us along" (332-3). Here we see, taking Judith Yarnall's discussion of Circe as the woman on top as a starting point, a triumph for Venus: "[T]he

female figure, holding some token of power, towers over her hapless victims, who kneel or cower before her" (101; see fig. 5-3). Yarnall is writing about a later period, but the image of Circe she describes sounds like one that might have existed in the Middle Ages (and Chaucer's works show a deep indebtedness to Ovid). In any case, the Wife does make her "hapless victims" look silly:

> Thanne wolde I seye, "Goode lief, taak keep
> How meekly looketh Wilkyn, oure sheep!
> Com neer, my spouse, let me ba thy cheke!
> Ye sholde been al pacient and meeke. . . ." (431-4)

The Wife of Bath does not precisely follow Circe's example. She makes the old husband into a meek sheep—not a tame lion, bear, or wolf, but the male animal is tamed. He becomes "Wilkyn" or Willie, and she pats him on the cheek. She also reverses marriage roles as they were supposed to be; *she* is teaching *him*, *she* is exhorting *him* to be "pacient and meeke." The Wife repeats the process with all three husbands. She can get away with this because she is younger than they, probably more intelligent, and certainly of stronger personality. She has no intention of being "pacient and meeke" herself or of submitting any more than she has to; her attitude is, "All right, I married you, you have my land; now it's your turn to do something for me."

This works well until the Wife falls in love with Jankyn, a twenty-year-old clerk (she is forty, but that doesn't matter; she is young for her age, rich, and well situated) (600-1, 605-6). In Jankyn, she finally has someone she loves and someone as intelligent as herself. She conducts her campaign by walking with

him in the fields and soon proposing to him, telling him the gory dream she pretends to have had (discussed above). Jankyn is agreeable to the marriage, but soon rebels: "He nolde suffer nothing of my list [desires]" (633). To anger her and to assert himself as master of the house, he procures and reads to her constantly the anthology of "Valerie and Theofraste." The Wife has no intention of taking this lying down; she gives her audience a detailed account of how she was "beten for a book, pardee!" (712). One evening, when Jankyn treats her to a reading of the book, she responds by tearing out three pages and physically assaulting her husband. As she recounts this part of her marriage experience:

> And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne [cease]
> To reden on this cursed book at nyght,
> Al sodeynly thre leves have I plight [plucked]
> Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
> I with my fest so took him on the cheke
> That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoune,
> And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun,
> And with his fest he smoot me on the heed
> That in the floor I lay as I were deed. (788-96)

The Wife's reproaches when she comes to—"Did you murder me for my land?"—and her desire to kiss him before she dies so affect Jankyn that he begs her forgiveness—only to have her hit him again! It costs this Circe something—the hearing of one ear—but the lion is tamed. (One wonders at this point if the Wife is deaf in one ear because she only "hears" one side of the story—her own. She does not come to see Jankyn's side until later, when they have placed their marriage on a new footing; yet the deafness remains as a souvenir of her earlier error.)

The beating Jankyn administers to her on this occasion may not have been the first of their marriage (remember that wife-beating was a sanctioned way of keeping women under control at this time, as we have seen). The Wife states:

> And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe [of all her husbands],
> That feele I on my ribbes al by rewe [one after another],
> And evere shal unto myn endying day,
> But in oure bed he was so fresh and gay . . .
> That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,
> He koude wynne again my love anon. (505-8, 511-2)

After the fight over the book, however, the Wife—who has hit *him* twice—must have declared her desire to have "governance," which Jankyn agrees to give her:

> He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
> To han the governance of hous and lond,
> And of his tonge, and of his hond also;
> And made hym brenne his book anon right tho [then]. (813-6)

The burning of the book signifies Jankyn's readiness to turn a new leaf; he adds: "Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf; *I* keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat" (821-2). "Honour" may have any one (or more) of several meanings here; if it means "fame, reputation, good name" (Davis et al., 76), Jankyn is implying that the Wife must keep her chastity; yet he has just told her that she may do as she wishes, whatever that may be! It is more likely to mean "respect," that is, his respect and that of the world. Chaucer may, of course, be playing on the various meanings of the word.

We turn now from the "Prologue," in which the Wife lays out her marriage history in fascinating detail, to the Wife's "Tale," which exhibits for our attention the stereotype and antistereotype of woman in this period. The antistereotype, or figure of the wished-for woman—sweet, submissive, and beautiful—was and is clung to by some males as a way of controlling, warding off, keeping within bounds the frightening figures of the Jungian Terrible Mother and of the seductress—the shadow side of the beloved Good Mother figure. The Loathly Lady figure in the "Tale" embodies both seductress and hag or Terrible Mother.

The antistereotype provides the ideals for woman to which the Wild Woman does not conform. The Wife is of course a Wild Woman who turns the conventions upside down, a perfect example of what a woman should not be in the eyes of the medieval cleric. Note that, according to Hallissy (2, 29), the ideal qualities for women in Chaucer's day were "purity, fidelity, and loyalty"; "[n]othing [was] more unfeminine than anger." The Wife certainly is not remarkable for "purity, fidelity, or loyalty," and she is very angry at the restrictions under which she—even she!—must live, as she details them in the first part of her "Prologue." The way in which she has managed to find some happiness within her restrictive society is simple: She turns everything upside down. She wins, by her sexual and personal wiles, the upper hand over her husbands, so that they will grant her freedom to do as she likes—which is what she really wants, not just dresses and jewelry. But there is a sadder aspect to her methods; she has not

been able to find—except, to some extent, with Jankyn—the happiness and romance she seeks, and hence can only find compensation in rebelling and doing as she wishes: "We love no man that taketh kepe or charge / Where that we goon. We wold be at oure large" (231-2).

Having had a taste of freedom, the Wife wants more. How do we know that she wants it? We see it not only from the story of Jankyn but also from her "Tale," the story of the Loathly Lady. True, this story is not original to her or to Chaucer; it is a folktale Stith Thompson labels type D732 (259), and it is found in other medieval works. Nevertheless, the fact that the Wife chooses it says something about her. The Loathly Lady fantasy satisfies her in two ways: it embodies her lust for triumph over men, and it gives her youth, beauty, and true love.

If we see the Loathly Lady as a projection of the Wife of Bath herself, we may be able to define her place in the company of Wild Women more clearly. Susan Crane (1994:84), recalling what have become stock associations, says, "The loathly lady of the *Wife of Bath's Tale* has close literary affiliations with those of the *Marriage of Sir Gawaine* and the *Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* who transform themselves for Gawain when he marries them in exchange for their aid and surrenders sovereignty to them." The same motif is found in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. It somewhat resembles the folk motif of the "Clinging-Woman" found in Native American mythology and described by Claude Lévi-Strauss as an old hag who, "[f]urious at being spurned, clings to [the hero's]

back, crushing him under her weight and not allowing him to eat any food" (57). In a Wichita tale, "the old woman refused to get off [the hero's back], and she explained to the hero that she had made up her mind to marry him in order to punish him for having always refused to take a wife" (58). Sometimes the Clinging-Woman is a frog woman (71), hardly attractive as a bride. In these tales, however, she is not transformed into a beautiful maiden but is pulled away and killed. The hero is one of a race of deceiving birds (58) or a human woman-chaser (73-4). He deserves his punishment, as does the hero of the Loathly Lady tales, but the punishment is not reversed. This shows that the Clinging-Woman, Loathly-Lady character, the character of the deceiving man, and the story itself have universality in far-distant parts of the world.

Crane goes on to say that the Lady's shapeshifting (and not her folk motif) implies that "feminine identity is not inherent in bodily appearance" and that the Lady's aged body and her aggressive sexuality "instantiate a repulsive, aggressive womanhood"—her "unsolicited lustfulness" contributes to her association with wildness and bestiality and to "her intimate threat to men." The shapeshifter, in both the beautiful and the ugly bodies, shows "exaggerated versions of womanhood" (1994:85, 88). Crane's concluding question (52) is, "Are Dame Ragnell and the Wife of Bath's old hag truly ugly and aggressive or truly beautiful and obedient? Such bivalence is irreducible in romance and it is gendered feminine." She seems to be saying that it is natural for women to want

both an aggressive role and a romantic-lover role. The Mars-Venus opposition, it seems, may not hold.

There is more. In the choice posed to the Knight in her "Tale," the Wife redefines both herself and an imagined husband (possibly Jankyn). The Knight is offered a choice between an old, ugly, and faithful, or a young and beautiful wife; and as Jill Mann (91) says, this is "a choice that forces the man to take responsibility for the results, rather than shifting the blame on to women." Mann continues: "The transformation [from hag to beauty] also implies that the condition for the fulfillment of male desires is their relinquishment: it is the Knight's renunciation of his own demands that magically releases his bride's transformation into a form that satisfies her desires" (92). The one cannot transform without the other. Circe, in contrast, transforms men not from worse to better but from better to worse, while she reveals herself to be, not only the fine lady she presents to Ulysses's men, but also a raging witch (Ovid 333-4) and later is revealed by her acolyte to be a woman wronged in love who harms men in revenge (336-7). She rescues a pathetic Ulysses, as the Loathly Lady rescues the young rapist. Circe, however, plans to transform Ulysses into a beast and is only prevented by his foreknowledge of her spells (333-4). The Wife in her "Prologue" tells how she transforms men into tame animals, and Jankyn from an "insensitive" husband, as we would say now, to a more "sensitive" one.

Some have argued that the Wife (and her self-projection, the Loathly Lady) gives in after reconciliation with her man, accepting the traditional wifely

role. I agree, however, with Mann, who says, "[T]he magical happy ending is a visionary glimpse of *mutuality* in male-female relationships" (91). As the Knight decides to change, the Lady also does: This marriage *can* be saved. The Lady not only serves as a teacher to the young man; she also teaches herself. As teacher she moves beyond her Circe role. No longer just an animal tamer, the Lady asserts her right to recognition as a woman who can think, and in recreating the traditional figure the Wife of Bath has asserted her own right to recognition. Chaucer, characteristically, has taken the lesson a step further than have others.

We see the same mechanism in the Wife's reconciliation with Jankyn. It is not giving in but a deciding, the making of a choice. As Priscilla Martin says, "Once the struggle for supremacy has ceased to be an issue, supremacy itself seems not to matter. . . . Both partners in a loving relationship are interdependent, no matter who might be the nominal leader" (62). The Wife, in her supposed "submission"—both to Jankyn in real life and to the Knight in fantasy—is behaving in a loving way toward her husband because she chooses to, not because she is forced to or is conforming to an external ideal of womanhood (not she!). In her previous marriages she manipulated men without love, as Circe does; now she interacts with a man she does love. I am sure that, if she really wants to do something, she will do it whether her husband approves or not.

Let us return for a moment to the "phallic woman" motif discussed earlier. The Wife at this period of her life, as H. Marshall Leicester Jr. (242-3) says, is trying to cast off her old self, which has had to see marriage as an exchange of commodities, and to make herself a virgin again, one who can hope for love. In the Wife's "Tale," the sweetness comes after marriage.

If the Wife sees her body as a penis, she may be rebelling against her supposedly "castrated" state (according to Freudian theory) in her desire to acquire power over men—and this castrated state is not due just to the lack of a penis but to the lack of power given her by her society. Only by acquiring power over men can she win the freedom to do as she likes, since she must have some sort of "permission" to do so. Her society does not allow her simply to go out and choose a career (fashion retailing)? She is a very successful weaver. She has to be devious.

The above is a Freudian approach. Carl Jung, on the other hand, could have classed the Wife under the category of "the Overdeveloped Eros," a type he develops in "Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype" (1973:28-31; this paper was originally written in 1938). Jung describes the type as developing "in reaction to a mother who is wholly a thrall of nature, purely instinctive and therefore all-devouring." Note that the Wife's mother taught her manipulation or "soutiltee." She learned from her mother how to stir up conflict in men by using "the burning ray of her Eros." In doing so she aroused both moral conflict and

consciousness of personality in the men to whom she directed her efforts. Jung continues:

> The stirring up of conflict is a Luciferian virtue in the true sense of the word. Conflict engenders fire, the fire of affects and emotions, and like every other fire it has two aspects, that of combustion and that of creating light. . . . The woman whose fate it is to be a disturbing element is not solely destructive, except in pathological cases. Normally, the disturber is herself caught in the disturbance; the worker of change is herself changed, and the glare of the fire she ignites both illumines and enlightens all the victims of the entanglement. What seemed a senseless upheaval becomes a process of purification. (30)

The Wife of Bath both literally throws the book into the fire and engenders emotional fire in her relationship with Jankyn. The Loathly Lady ignites a conflict of life-or-death seriousness in the young Knight. Circe turns men into swine, thus bringing them to shame. But the Wife of Bath, her Loathly Lady, and even Circe are themselves changed. The Jungian approach leads to a recognition that the Wife is "not solely destructive" but "is herself changed" and "both illuminates and enlightens" herself and Jankyn, as well as those of her audience who have stayed the course. Note, however, that a Freudian woman-as-phallus must of necessity seem, to a frightened male, a Jungian Terrible Mother. The Knight matures when he realizes that the hag is not just a bogeywoman but is bringing the structure he lacked to his life, teaching him something. In this way we can see truth in both approaches.

To return to the fourteenth-century perspective with which this chapter began, we may consider the question of woman as teacher. Must a woman who

attempts to teach be perceived as unfeminine? The Wife, and her alter ego, the Loathly Lady, have been perceived as unfeminine, but I do not see these two figures as pathological or unwomanly, not even as simply representative of a type of Wild Woman. They are true women, complete female human beings. As Susan Schibanoff notes, "[T]he Wife achieves her unique status among medieval literary women not so much because of her outspokenness . . . but because of her refusal to limit her life story to one particular genre, her life to one particular role . . . it is the either/or (single-role) images of women in traditional medieval genres that she challenges" (126-7). It is this refusal to be limited, this insistence on being a round character, that makes the Wife more than a stereotype. She combines the traits of all our Wild Women; she is seductive and (apparently) changeable and deceitful like the Mermaid (or Circe), dangerous and demanding as the Harpy, strident and armed like Grendel's mother, and a Fighting Woman as well. Chaucer demonsterizes and dedemonizes the Wife by showing how she develops from Mermaid, Harpy, and Terrible Mother to a woman in a mutual love relationship and to a fully rounded female character, a whole person. Perhaps she is the first such woman in medieval literature.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

We have now gone from Circe, the Wild Woman who tames animals, to a woman who tames husbands. We have gone from the Harpy, a bringer of death, and Grendel's mother as avenger of a death to the Wild Women (Iseut, Wife of Bath) who celebrate life. We have seen how Emelye deals with her limited options, and how Iseut circumvents the conventions of her existence. We have seen the courage and strength the Wife of Bath achieves.

Judith Yarnall (5) prefers to think of Circe "simply as an archetypal woman of power . . . [rather] than as an anima figure." Since the anima has been defined as "the unconscious male image in women" (Rycroft 8), it seems to me that Yarnall's limitation makes sense in that it opens a possibility to see what women would like to be in a way that does not depend on definition of freedom in terms of masculinity. "I would rather be a man," women sometimes say; "it's a man's world." Why should a woman not have the freedom to define herself as a woman, so that she can be free and prefer her life as a woman?

A patient of Jung's had a fantasy of a "divine woman . . . *wearing* a *blood-red garment that covers the lower half of her body"* who *"hands* [a young girl] *as a present to the many men who are standing by"* (1959:192). The red garments remind us of the Wife of Bath's red stockings, and the role of "initiating" girls seems a not impossible one for her, or rather perhaps for a partial source figure,

the Old Woman of the *Romance of the Rose*; we remember also the Wife's mother, who taught her to manipulate men. The divine woman in this dream is an aspect of the Terrible Mother.

This sensual woman is the one we warn our sons about, who is to be found in hidden, obscure, and unwholesome places; yet as a literary character she is often the one who is seen as freer than other women, free from the shackles of conventional feminine behavior. Yarnall may prefer not to see this woman as the anima, but male writers over the centuries have tended to see her as not-male, other, and hence terrifying. What has this fear led men to? As Freud, Jung, and Klein would have it in their different ways, it has led to two visions of the mother—the good and giving, the terrible and withholding.

> [T]he mother-image in a man's psychology [says Jung] is entirely different in character from a woman's. For a woman, the mother typifies her own conscious life as conditioned by her sex. But for a man the mother typifies something alien, which he has yet to experience and which is filled with the imagery latent in the unconscious. [Woman does not idealize the mother, but man idealizes her]; one idealizes whenever there is a secret fear to be exorcized. What is feared is the unconscious and magical influence. (1970:39-40)

And he adds elsewhere:

> Perhaps the historical example of the dual nature of the mother most familiar to us is the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to the medieval allegories, his cross. . . . There are three essential aspects of the mother: her cherishing and nourishing goodness, her orgiastic emotionality, and her Stygian depths. (1959:16)

The Mother, then, is not only the Good and Terrible Mother; she is the Great Mother. Her powers appear to have seemed magical not only to human beings of the present but men of the far past, who did not yet realize that woman's ability to produce children was not magical, but that it was a natural process in which they themselves had a part. The dethroning of women may have begun with this realization.

Men may, at times, seem to have succeeded in reducing woman to a pretty and obedient robot. Yet she keeps creeping back, as unconscious elements always do. She enters the imagination through the back door as a supernatural person—Grendel's mother, the dark and murderous goddess of the mere; the Harpy, a smiling Siren or Mermaid who draws young men down to the depths; and finally a sorceress who tames men and makes them into animals. (As we have seen, this is one role of Iseut and the Wife of Bath.) Through the front door she enters as a beautiful and beloved wife or as a bourgeois woman (again, the Wife of Bath) who, in spite of her husbands, manages to turn the conventions upside down.

What then? Add them all together, and we get a psychologically complete woman? No. These figures emphasize one or two elements of woman; none is psychologically complete—not even the Wife of Bath, though she transcends the fiction of the *Canterbury Tales* to become a character. Chaucer's pilgrims speak of her as if they know her, and he himself refers to her in a letter advising a friend not to marry. Even she, however, is deformed as a person by the

necessity of operating within a restrictive society and by her anger at those restrictions. Iseut deftly escapes the conventions by lying; but, of course, this should not be necessary.

I feel that the Wild Women whose fictional lives I have presented here were acting in response to a need to define themselves. Grendel's mother is a familiar figure: With no interest in Grendel's father, whoever he might be, she makes her son her sole emotional focus. When Grendel is mortally injured by Beowulf, his mother lives only for revenge—and almost achieves it. The Circe-Mermaid type copes by seducing and destroying men; the Harpy simply destroys, impelled by her fierce unsatisfied hunger. Iseut defines herself as an individual at the cost of integrity and truth, though she gains at least a partial freedom. Emelye struggles with self-definition—is she Amazon or not? How can she best find happiness, and must she sacrifice freedom? The Wife seduces and tames her old husbands while dreaming of romance and consoling herself by frequent traveling; only in her relationship with Jankyn, when she has by previous marriages accumulated enough money to live independently and do as she pleases, can she be fully herself.

Strong enough to be unwilling to submit to the female stereotype, these women attempt to create new molds for themselves. But this is all they do. They do not break fully out. Their wildness, whatever form it takes, is their role. These women are defined, above all, by their embodiment and transcendence of the stereotypes on which their characters are based: the dangerous woman

(seductive and/or threatening), the lascivious and outspoken woman given to wandering, the woman who longs for freedom in the wilderness, and, above all, the Terrible Mother.

The Terrible Mother is best represented by Grendel's mother, but elements of her character can be seen in all the figures given attention here. Yet the Terrible Mother is only a part of the Great Mother. Neumann (11, 12) includes among his "wreath of symbolic images"

> not only *one* figure but a great number of figures, of Great Mothers . . . who, as goddesses and fairies, female demons and nymphs, friendly and unfriendly, manifest the one Great Unknown, the Great Mother as the central aspect of the Archetypal Feminine, in the rites and myths, the religions and legends, of mankind [*sic*].

This Great Mother herself is only "a partial aspect of the Archetypal Feminine," according to Neumann; the concept "Great Mother" refers to "a complex psychic situation of the ego." The adjective "Great" expresses the superiority of this figure to everything human and to created nature.

What does the Great Mother have to do with us? Do we have a perceivable relationship to this mythic figure? The answer is: We are all the Great Mother. We may even, at times, or some of us may, become the Terrible Mother—the other side, the dark side of the Great Mother that we have been discussing all through this study. She is the one who withholds, threatens, condemns, even kills (though we note that Grendel's mother kills to avenge her son). She is also the one who is not afraid to do what she has to do, who fights the fights she needs to fight.

The women we study are partial aspects of the Terrible Mother. They struggle against the limitations of power placed on women. Their power is the dream of the oppressed woman. In their frightening aspects, they show man what they can do when roused, as the Wife of Bath shows Jankyn when she throws his book into the fire.

Are we all Terrible Mothers? Are we all Wild Women? I hope so. For only the Wild Woman is free to be herself, to express her own needs and struggle to realize them. I hope that, in years to come, more and more of us will be free to do this, free to use the powers we as part of the Great Mother possess.

We differ from the women of classical and medieval times in that we have so many more choices; for a young medieval woman (perhaps as young as twelve) the choice was between marriage or the convent, and the choice was often not her own. Marriage was not a matter of love, but of alliance. The Wife of Bath is a successful businesswoman, but she gained her capital by marriage. We realize that there are still barriers (we call them glass ceilings now) to complete self-definition, and each generation of women struggles with this. I hope that I may have contributed in small part to this liberation.

A final word: In beginning this project I had planned to write about half-human beings, both male and female, but my plan soon shifted to include only female beings, some of whom are half-human and some not. The Innocent Wild Woman, at first one of my primary figures, was too closely linked with the Wild

Man, a figure of pageantry and folklore, to be included as a main character. Grendel's mother and the Wife of Bath, of course, were the most important figures I could identify. I found them both individually and structurally useful: One at the beginning, one at the end, they stand like sculptures framing a gateway, the door to a better understanding of ourselves as women.

Beyond Grendel's mother and the Wife of Bath, I needed other figures to represent other aspects of woman. The Mermaid is well known and was in earlier times thought of as deceitful and untrustworthy, as we see from the portrait of her in the Middle English *Physiologus*. Moreover, on further exploring this character, we see that she has ancestors who derive from the spiritual and nurturing Harpy to the hungry and menacing Harpy, and thence to the Siren who is not what she appears. The Siren may be either bird (like the Harpy) or fish; her descendant is the Mermaid we know, the half-fish who yet has the same character as the Siren.

Seeking other female figures, I realized one day that Emelye, too, is not only what she appears to be, a sweet puppet; she is an Amazon and must struggle with her dual nature and her dual role—she is not only the sister of the Amazon Queen but also the sister-in-law of the authoritarian Theseus. Iseut came last in my plans after I read, in a course on Arthurian literature, Béroul's *Romance of Tristan* and realized Iseut's importance as a woman character who deals with the conventions by being deceitful and by role-playing; she enjoys the role of court lady, but is really a Wild Woman.

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present-day mankind springs in large part from the one-sidedly patriarchal development of the male intellectual consciousness, which is no longer kept in balance by the matriarchal world of the psyche" (xlii). "Great Mother, Good Mother, and Terrible Mother form a cohesive archetypal group" (21). There are four poles of the Feminine archetype: the Mother and the Virgin (positive) and the young witch and old witch (negative) (77). The Terrible Mother is the old witch, while "stupor, enchantment, helplessness and dissolution" and "intoxicants and poisons" "belong to the sphere of seduction by the young witch" (74). On pages 141-6 Neumann discusses animal symbolism in half-human representations of the feminine: fish, snakes, birds, harpies, and sirens. On pages 147-61 he discusses the power of the Terrible Mother in her various manifestations. We can trace both the young witch and the Terrible Mother in our study of the Wild Woman.

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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